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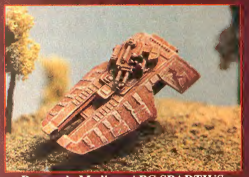

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# WORD BALLOONS

## Undercover

Somehow, it doesn't seem quite fair. Growing up when I did (in the '60s), there was, I admit, a legion of heroic merchandise. But it was a primitive time. We didn't have Underoos.

Today, I can't see buying, much less wearing, underwear emblazoned with the faces of my favorite superheroes. But back then, when I was younger—*then*, it would have made sense. After all, in those days, didn't we improvise our own costumes? A red towel was perfect for Superman's cape. A white cowboy hat perched atop your head made you the Lone Ranger. A green plastic war helmet and a lollipop (a cigar substitute) and you were Sgt. Fury or Sgt. Rock (your choice) fighting the good fight of WWII (never Vietnam, then fresh and new and bloody).

Underoos, however, have haunted me. These special T-shirts and shorts, all branded with the distinctive images of various super characters, were designed and sized for boys and girls ages 4-12. I first saw them on sale a few years ago and I remember saying aloud and shocking the sales clerks, "This is awful! Why didn't they have these when *I* was a kid?!?" How much more heroic attending elementary school would have been!! Just like my heroes, I might have concealed a costume, as it were, underneath the thenguise of normalcy (i.e. tye-die shirts, nehru jackets, medallions, bell bottom pants, apache scarfs; leisure suits for the very young came later).

I don't know if they're still making Underoos or a competitive line (whose less catchy title I never remember), but I'm reminded of these items by Assistant Editor Eddie Berganza and Art Director Jim McLernon. Both of them—ostensibly for Halloween, they assure me—bought complete Batman movie costumes (advertised in our pages) so that they could dress heroic whenever the need arises, old chum. They have not, as of yet, worn their warm-looking, rubber costumes all day around the office under their civvies. When they do, it will give new definition to the term "sweatshop."

Eddie has been investigating the whole subject of licensed toys and merchandise for some time. Personally, I think it's just to make up this list of really good Christmas gifts, a list which can then be photocopied and given to all his friends (along with ordering information, relevant sizes and directions to the retail outlets stocking this stuff). Eddie has prevailed up on us to devote The Scene this issue (see page 6) to enumerating his personal choices in licensed toys. It's an eclectic group and if Eddie's good, Santa might even send him all of them. C.O.D.

Despite my fascination with all things licensed, I must admit to some trepidation. I know that there are many characters created by specialty and toy firms not with entertainment, education or even immediate sales in mind. The idea behind these characters—who will remain unnamed, since this is hard to prove—is more than a little cold-blooded: "Let's create characters that we can squeeze a very good licensing program out of and sell to lotsa other businesses." Licensing is the *first* consideration, good characters and good stories are distinctly secondary. And, you know, that's simply distasteful. Nobody worried about how many greeting cards, gift wrap paper rolls and plush toys were going to be sold when the likes of Bugs Bunny, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Dick Tracy, Spider-Man, Doonesbury and Tom & Jerry were created decades ago.

In a longer draft of their article on the newly revived *Pogo* comic strip (see page 29), Barry Gantt and Sandra Pungor pointed out the problem. They quoted the *LA Times* Syndicate's Don Michel as saying, "The [Walt Kelly] family wants to get into merchandising but they want to do it in a special way—somewhere on the scale between basically *no* promotions like *Calvin & Hobbes* and other properties that do *everything* they can find." And they cited a truly nightmarish vision—the image of "millions of little Pogos stuck helplessly to car windows with suction cups." It gives one pause.

And I guess it rules out those Pogo Underoos Eddie wanted.

*—David McDonnell/Editor*

**COMICS SCENE RETURNS** next decade with the conclusion of Jami Bernard's talk with **Bill Sienkiewicz**. . .an insider look at the filming of **Simon & Kirby's Captain America**. . . and those outrageous plans for making the **Turtles** into **Teenage Mutant Ninja Movie Stars**. It's all part of **COMICS SCENE #12, on sale Thursday, February 22, 1990.**

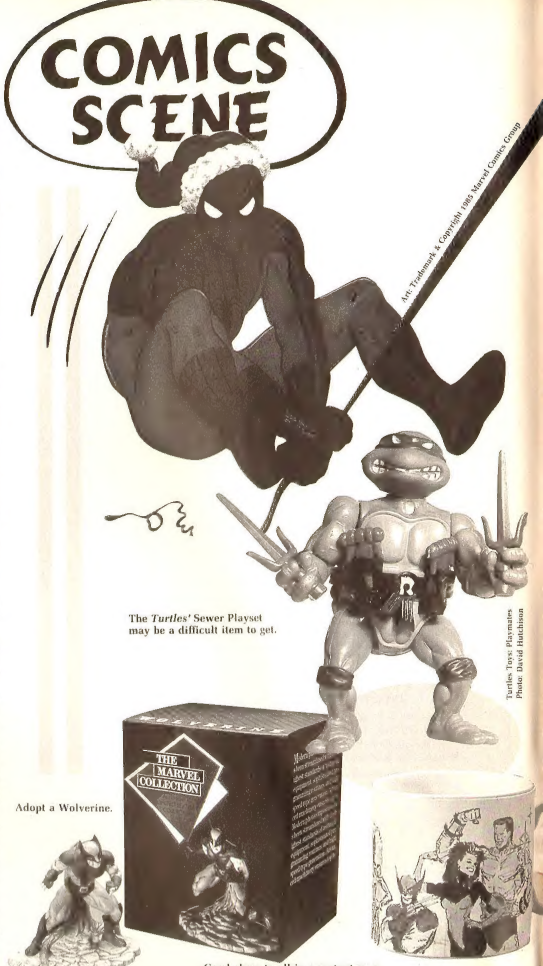
# Super Stocking Stuffers

Jingle bats, jingle bats, jingle all the way. Oh, what fun it'll be to ride in a one-bat open sleigh. Yes, ol' Saint Nick may need some help from that Caped Crusader just to keep up with all the orders for bat-merchandise. Adding to this ever-growing, increasingly endless list (which Santa is getting tired of checking twice) are the different size versions of the diecast Batmobile, Batwing and Joker's Van from ERTL. These range from the Micro Set which are 1/128 in scale to the original and the 1/43 scale which allow for more authentic detail and include drivers. If that wasn't enough, there's even an assembly model of the Dark Knight's awesome auto available, too.

Speaking of Tim Burton's friends, "the Ghost with the Most" is about to join with the same people that brought you the *Star Wars* toys, Kenner, to unleash a premiere toy line of his own. Those little demons, uh, darlings had enough? No? Well, Wolverine, or at least, a new statuette of him, should quiet them down. And once you're finally able to sit back and enjoy the latest batch of Marvel Masterworks, use a new mutant mug to sip egg nog from. Then, make way for the march of the Marvel Men figurines. Spider-Man and the Punisher lead the way this season, only to be followed by a whole new set early in the next decade.

And how could anyone ring in the New Year without our old friend Gumby, dammit!? Art Clokey's little boy is coming on strong with plush bendables and designer clothes. Other emerald heroes will also be competing for *your* green, and there's no escaping them. Already, there's Turtles cereal, pizza, trading cards and bubble bath. So, it's possible the kids may be leaving Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cookies for Santa in the hope of getting their new Sewer Playset. With the Turtles movie and the possibility of a live Turtles tour show on its way, the "Year of the Bat" may be forgotten in the decade of the heroes in a half-shell. Then again, July 4 will officially start Captain America's 50th anniversary celebration, and plenty of patriotic product is planned. Happy Holidays, *if* you can afford them.

*—Eddie Berganza*


COMICS SCENE
Art, Trademark & Copyright© 1989 Marvel Comics Group
The *Turtles'* Sewer Playset may be a difficult item to get.
Turtles Toys: Playmates
Photo: David Hutchinson
Adopt a Wolverine.
THE MARVEL COLLECTION
Good cheer to all in a mutant mug.

Turtles Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Mirage Studios

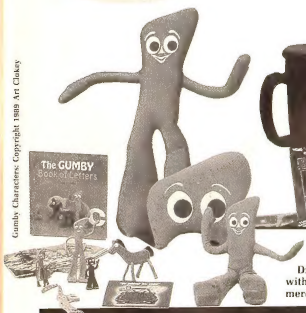
In from Gotham for the holidays, ERTL's 1/43rd scale version of the Batwing and the miniature Joker's Van and Batmobile.

Bat Vehicles Photos: Courtesy ERTL

Photo: David Hutchison

Check your list, did you get all the bat-goodies?

Gumby Characters Copyright 1988 Art Clokey




Dream of a green Christmas with Gumby and his merchandise.

Coming in the new year: the Mighty Marvel Men.

Marvel Toy Photos: Courtesy Marvel Comics

All Batman Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc.
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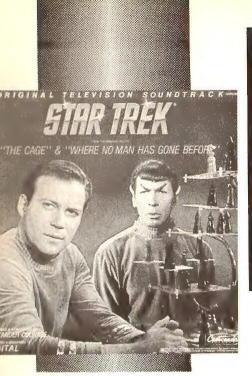


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# The Immortal FIGHTING AMERICAN

*Joe Simon & Jack Kirby created him as another Captain America, but he became a legend all his own.*

All Fighting American Art: By & Copyright 1988 Joe Simon & Jack Kirby

It's rare for Marvel Comics to reprint any of their pre-1960s comic-book output these days. It's virtually unheard-of for them to reprint a character they never published in the first place. But that's what Marvel has done with their hardcover *Fighting American* project.

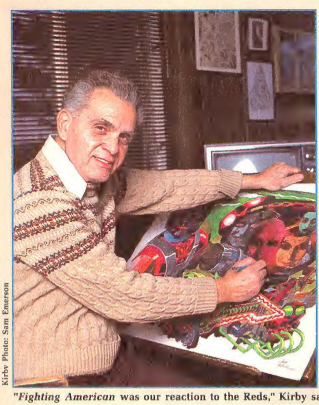
Longtime comics readers don't have to ask why Marvel would undertake such an unusual venture. *Fighting American* is a classic.

The year was 1954. Dwight Eisenhower was in the White House. Senator Joseph McCarthy was frightening the nation with his "Red Under Every Bed" paranoia. In response to the perceived Communist menace, Atlas Comics—as Marvel was known in the 1950s—had just revived Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's Captain America in the pages of *Young Men*—without Simon and Kirby.

And so, in response to Captain America, Simon and Kirby created the immortal Fighting American. Few comics characters created during that era have achieved such a legendary reputation among readers who hadn't even been born during its original run. Then partners with Crestwood Publications, the prolific writer/artist duo was producing comics such as *Young Romance* and *Black Magic*, under the Mainline/Prize imprint.

"We were doing all these successful books and had a lot of money to throw around," Joe Simon recalls. "Jack and I decided we were going to show *Captain America* how to put out a Captain America. We said, 'How close can we come to Captain America without being murdered?' But after we got into Fighting American, he became his own person."

**"I think both of us had had a bellyful of serious heroes at the time," recalls Kirby.**



Kirby. Photo: Sam Emerson

**"*Fighting American* was our reaction to the Reds," Kirby says.**

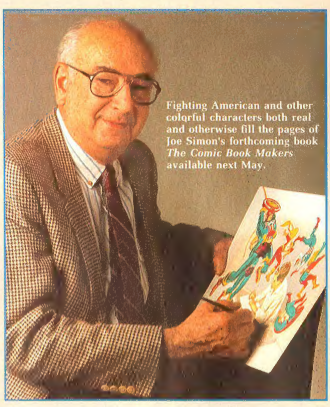


Photo: Konstantin/Courtesy Joe Simon

**Fighting American and other colorful characters both real and otherwise fill the pages of Joe Simon's forthcoming book *The Comic Book Makers* available next May.**

Jack Kirby concurs. "Fighting American was a product of rethinking—of refreshing an old theme. We wanted it to be Captain America," he says. "And Speedboy, we wanted him to be Bucky."

In the beginning, that's all Fighting American was. From his Captain America-style red, white, gold and blue uniform to the feisty boy sidekick who could easily have been Bucky Barnes' cousin, Fighting American *was* Captain America. Even his origin was a variation on the same theme.

The first issue of *Fighting American* depicted in brutal detail the murder of red-baiting TV broadcaster Johnny Flagg by Peter Piper's Red Vipers. Grief-stricken and wanting to avenge his older brother's death, frail Nelson Flagg agrees to participate in the government's super-secret Project Fighting American. He's strapped into an electronic chair and his mind transferred into the costumed body of his dead brother. When Nelson Flagg stands up, for all intents and purposes he has become Johnny Flagg and so assumes his identity and mission in life.

As Fighting American, Nelson/Johnny fought Communist plots in some of the most inspired action scenes Kirby ever drew. It was unrelentingly grim fare, far punchier than what Atlas was then doing with Captain America—who had left the Army to teach school and fight the Communist threat between classes. Otherwise, there was little difference between the two. At first.

"We started out deadly seriously," Simon recalls. "The first issue is like the first issue of *Captain America*. It was very patriotic. Captain America was so successful with Adolph Hitler as the villain that with *Fighting American*, we thought we could do the same thing with the Commies."

However, the winds of change were already sweeping the country. After months of the Army-McCarthy hearings and indiscriminate blacklisting, Simon and Kirby took the book in an entirely new direction with the second issue. The action remained trademark Simon & Kirby, but a new ingredient was included in the mix: satire. From that point on, the villains became funnier, uglier and increasingly inept. They bore names like Square Hair Malloy, Rhode Island Red, Invisible Irving, Jiseppi the Jungle Boy and possibly the most infamous of all, Super-Khakalovitch—a kind of Russian Superman whose strength came from his body odor.

"We were the first Commie bashers in comics," Joe Simon chuckles. "Senator McCarthy was putting a very bad rap on red Americans, and then about the second issue, the country was putting a bad rap on Senator McCarthy. So, we stopped taking them seriously. From then on, it was just satirical."

"That was my idea," Kirby recalls, "but Joe agreed entirely. I think both of us had had a bellyful of serious heroes at the time. The war had spent itself inside us and inside everybody else. The atmosphere was very bleak. It was right after the war. So, we decided to do something different. And the field itself demanded a satirical strip, something to laugh at and still be done very well."

This was the post-Golden Age period. Superheroes were not doing well. EC-inspired horror titles dominated the industry. In the paranoia of the times, even comics were coming under fire as a supposed bad influence on children. Dr. Fredric Wertham had just published his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*. The Comics Code was just around the corner. At a time of ultimate grimness, Fighting American stuck his tongue out at all the hysteria. It was a breath of fresh air for the otherwise unfunny Cold War era.

"*Fighting American* was our reaction to the Reds," Kirby says. "We didn't look upon the Reds as the same kind of an enemy as the Nazis. The Nazis were very sure of themselves. They were evil to us because they were the antithesis of everything we stood for. They were going to make slaves of us. We were going to become their puppets. It's the kind of a life an American could never lead. Whereas the Russians were like Super-Khakalovitch. Super-Khaklovitch had one beef. They gave him a second-rate uniform.

"There was hysteria about Communism and it was fostered by our own leaders," Kirby goes on. "We read about it in the papers every day. Speaking for myself, I had enough of

that stuff and I think everybody else did. You could see our attitude reflected in the strip. The patriotic character was us. Fighting American and Speedboy were always us. Just as Captain America was always us. It was us looking out at what was taking place. We always got involved with the action, and the more we did in the case of Fighting American, the sillier it became. We had a lot of fun with it."

At a time when fear of subversive elements dominated the headlines, it was a risky, even daring, approach.

"It's because I didn't believe they were that serious a challenge," Kirby says now. "I was brought up as a city boy and I had seen Communist parades and union strikes. The Communists had one stage, and that was the streets. I think the average American never took them seriously. They never got a foothold here, not in a serious way. Americans never deviate from their own history."

History may have ultimately proven Simon and Kirby correct, but not in time to have rescued *Fighting American* from cancellation. It was put to rest with the seventh issue, only a year after it had begun. Still, Simon and Kirby had the last laugh in the war of patriotic superheroes. *Fighting American* outlasted the revived Commie-fighting Captain America by a good six months.

"We were making so much money on the other stuff," Joe Simon explains, "we figured if *Fighting American* wasn't selling a million copies a month, we would try something else. It had a good sale, but not a great sale. Today, it would be great."

"The times were bad for all magazines," Kirby adds. "One magazine was going out of business after another. It wasn't *Fighting American* itself. It was flagging capital. We couldn't exist in that kind of an atmosphere. Everyone was having trouble. With *Fighting American*, our coffers weren't overflowing."

*Fighting American* went into limbo for 11 years. In that time, the team of Simon and Kirby had split up. Kirby subsequently returned to Marvel, revivising—this time successfully—Captain America with Stan Lee.

In 1966, while Captain America was riding high, Harvey Comics released a one-shot *Fighting American*, which in addition to reprinting vintage stories, included the three tales from the unpublished eighth issue. It created an entire new generation of Fighting American fans—and triggered a big demand for back issues that continues to this day.

That seemed to be the end of *Fighting American* until earlier this year when Joe Simon renewed the copyright on the character and approached Marvel with the property through Marvel's Sid Jacobson, with whom Simon had worked at Harvey.

FIGHTING AMERICAN
assignment:
Find the KING of the CRIME SYNDICATE
MEET
DOUBLEHEADER
THE MOST AMAZING VILLAIN OF ALL TIME!
All Art: Courtesy Joe Simon, Will Murray & Marvel Comics

**"What comes to mind is Doubleheader, the guy with two heads," says Simon, nominating his favorite baddie. "And each head hated the other."**

"I had a meeting with [Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Tom DeFalco," Simon relates, "and showed him what our proofs looked like. Tom thought it was a great idea, so we made a deal to do a *Fighting American* collection. They asked me how many original pages I had and I told them 73. And while we were doing it—maybe they had this in mind all along, I don't know—they decided they wanted to do the entire collection. That came to substantially more than 73 pages."

Thus was born the Marvel hardcover edition of *Fighting American*, which is uniform with the other Marvel Masterworks volumes, although not packaged under that banner.

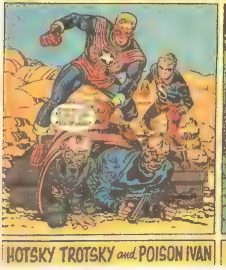
In order to reprint the entire *Fighting American* run, Simon had to gather together all the original art still in existence and in some cases, restore it for publication.

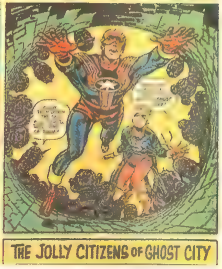
"When I see what they've done with it," Simon says proudly, "I'm very happy—despite all the work. I had no idea they were going to put out such a great physical production."

VON FEYGEL and HIS TIN CANS

BUT WE COULD STILL BE UNITED TO STOP HIM IF WE DON'T LET OUR PETTY DIFFERENCES KEEP US APART!
RHODE ISLAND RED! WITH A PROPOSITION FOR YOU!
OH, NO!

YUSCHA LIFFSO LONG and RHODE ISLAND RED




**As the series progressed, the foes became more far-out.**

**"We were the first Commie bashers in comics," Simon says. But to hear Poison Ivan tell it, it was all a Russian plot.**

The Marvel edition reprints the entire seven-issue run, as well as the Harvey stories and one never-published tale in a spectacular 196-page hardcover package.

"I think there was a three-pager that we had that wasn't printed," Simon says. "Everything that was ever done on it is in the book. The only new things are some text by myself and some text by Jack. It's the story of how we came to do *Fighting American*, told in all candor."

"We did it jointly," Kirby recalls. "We kicked it around. We had to have the name 'American' in it, and 'Fighting American' *seemed* like a perfect name. It was the kind of name that had some punch in it, and it worked!"

Since both Simon and Kirby were capable writers and artists, they split those duties.

"The standard way that Simon and Kirby worked," Joe Simon explains, "was that I would write out the story on the page in longhand and make little sketches and roughs. Jack would take over and finish the pencilling. Then, if we had time, I would ink it. I think Jack and I had our happiest days when we were doing the Crestwood books.

Why would Marvel want to reprint a non-Marvel character—especially one that was designed as an unabashed copy of Captain America? Simon believes he knows.

"The unique thing about *Fighting American*," he says, "was that it was the first of the satirical books. I think Jack and Stan Lee used that as a model for the new Marvel line. Marvel must have appreciated it more than Jack and I did!"

Both Simon and Kirby have retained fond memories of Fighting American, despite his short-lived lifespan. Kirby says he still has fans asking him about the character. And in the 1960s, Joe Simon painted a parody version of the classic Fighting American origin panel as a cover for *Sick* magazine, showing a concerned Fighting American about to have his mind transferred into the misfit body of *Sick*'s version of Alfred E. Neuman.

Each man is quick to recall a favorite story or villain.

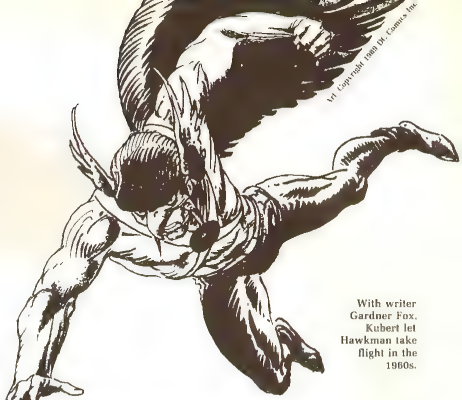
"Well, there's Super-Khakalovitch," Kirby recalls. "Super-Khakalovitch was a stereotype, of course. The average Russian to me was a guy who didn't really possess much. In fact, the reason he fought Fighting American was because he loved Fighting American's underwear. He loved good clothes, and of course, he couldn't get it in Russia. Even his costume was second hand. So, he felt humiliated. It's not that he disliked Fighting American, it's just that he wanted that uniform because it was made of better goods!"

"What comes to mind is Doubleheader," Simon says, "the guy with the two heads. And each head hated each other." Simon chuckles at the memory. "Graphically, it was great. And Poison Ivan."

Poison Ivan and his commissar, Hotski Trotski, may have been Simon and Kirby's most nefarious Commies. Ivan was a propagandist who filled children's heads with stories of how Russia invented everything from baseball to bingo. When Johnny Flagg starts receiving Karl Marx-style hate mail from kids, he and Speedboy trick the fiends into exposing themselves. What began as fun, however, later turns murderous when the heroes are ambushed by the duplicitous duo. Simon and Kirby never let the satire get in the way of the action.

"Remember, Fighting American also fought gangsters," Kirby adds. "He fought the kind of guys that were

*(continued on page 66)*




With writer Gardner Fox, Kubert let Hawkman take flight in the 1960s.

# Kubert's Command

*Now teaching a new group of combatting cartoonists, Joe Kubert recalls the illustration wars.*

By ROBERT HAMBRECHT

The work of Winsor McCay and Hal Foster adorns the walls of the Joe Kubert School in Dover, New Jersey. Very few pieces by the institution's namesake are prominently displayed, an example of Kubert's modesty. Yet if he were a different kind of person, he could easily boast about a slew of comic art triumphs.

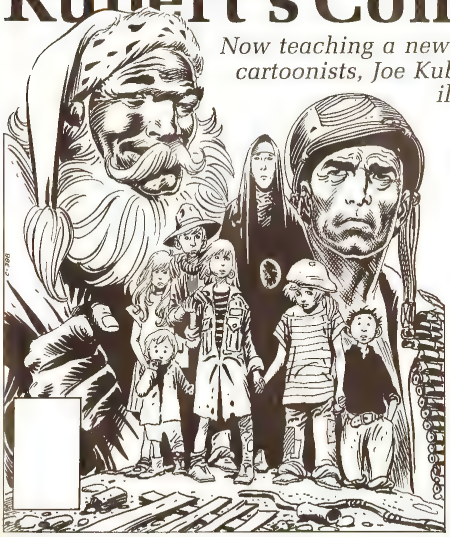
Having decided at age 11 to become a comic book artist, Kubert—inspired by Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* and Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*—enrolled in Brooklyn's High School of Music and Art during the 1930s. After studying fine arts, he hit the streets. He learned comic art under fire and went from drawing five-page fillers to working on and developing the Golden Age *Hawkman* and creating *Tor*, an early prehistoric world comic.

But with *Sgt. Rock*, Kubert established himself as a major comic artist. His renditions of the battle-scarred but undaunted Rock of Easy Company defined the style of war comics and their heroes to the point that any tough but endearing combat sergeant always brings Kubert's Rock to mind.

Not surprisingly, behind his salt and pepper beard, Kubert somewhat resembles Sgt. Rock. The artist speaks steadily, smiling and laughing occasionally as he talks about his early years in comics.

"At the tender age of 11 or 12," "Kubert says, "I used to take my drawings and sketches, wrapped in newspaper, to comic book publishers whose names and addresses appeared inside the covers. I would go up and say, 'This is what I can do. Can I get a job?' I didn't even realize what I was asking. All I knew was that I liked drawing heroic figures and telling stories with pictures.

"The editors, artists and art directors invariably would comment on my work. They recognized the seri-




Art Copyright 1983 DC Comics Inc.

**Thanks to DC's reprint specials and word of a *Sgt. Rock* movie, a new generation of fans are discovering Joe Kubert's work.**

Photo: Courtesy Joe Kubert School

"A cartoonist takes on the parts of the characters he's drawing," says Kubert. "their nuances, how they react and how their emotions spell out on their faces."

"Why Sheldon Mayer gave me the opportunity to do [the original Hawkman], I'll never understand," the artist still wonders.

Years ago, Fox and Kubert dramatically revamped the high-flying fighter. Now, inspired by their work, Tim Truman continues his own revision with a new Hawkman series about to take wing.

I'LL DEFEAT YOU ANYWAY, RIGHT NOW!
WON'T YOU BE SURPRISED!...
POW!
OW! VANDAL SAVAGE HAS KIDNAPPED ME AND SO HAVE ALL THE ESCAPED PRISONERS! I'VE BEEN TRICKED!

Art: Copyright 1947, 1989 DC Comics, Inc.

Hawkman, Sgt. Rock & Associated Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc.

ousness of my intent, which is one of the reasons they spent time with me. They would say things like, 'Hey, kid, your stuff isn't quite good enough yet. Go home and practice your anatomy.' Watch your figure drawing,' or 'This is how you use a brush.'

"What I had to learn about getting into the business," insists Kubert, "was learned from all these good people who *never hesitated* in showing me what to do. All kinds of people—guys like [artists] Mort Meskin and Irv Novick—were more than kind in giving me assistance, suggestions and ideas.'

The fledgling artist struggled to break into comics at a time when the recently-born comic industry was trying to establish itself.

"It was another world 50 years ago," Kubert remarks. "At that time, there were about 20 or 25 different publishers. Anyone who wanted to publish a comic came up with $2,000 or $3,000 and they were in business. So, there were many different comic-book publishers willing to pay two, three or five dollars a page just to fill up 64 pages of material. If five pages were real stinkeroos—like mine were—then it was counter-balanced by the other 50 or 60 pages of reasonably good material. That's how I got my first break into comics. It was my opportunity to make all kinds of mistakes and glitches while learning on the job. My first strip, Voltan, appeared in something called *Catman Comics*. I can't remember the name of the publishing company. [It was Holyoke.]"

But within a short time, Kubert began working on some of his first memorable characters like Hawkman. "I started doing 'Hawkman' while I was still in high school in the early '40s," he explains. "Sheldon Mayer was my first editor. Shelly is probably one of the few certified geniuses in the business. He's a wonderful talent and an incredible guy. Why he ever gave me the opportunity to do that particular character, and covers too, at that time, I'll never understand. It was a godsend to me, and despite the fact that I was terrible when it came to maintaining deadlines, he still had the patience of three saints. I believe he was the first regular editor of my work. I continued to work for him until I went into the Army."

Surprisingly, although Kubert, an artist noted for his believable depictions of combat, entered the service at the beginning of the Korean War, he never saw action. Never forced to give up his sketching pad for a machine gun, Kubert—like Will Eisner before him—wielded a deadly paint brush in Special Services.

"I was in the Army from 1950-52," he recalls. "I worked in the sign shop at Fort Dix for about a year. Then, everyone had to do overseas duty. Some guys were sent directly to Korea and others were lucky enough to be sent to Europe. I was one of the ones selected to go to Germany. I was sent to southern Bavaria and did artwork and other things connected with Special Services, like shows. Private First Class was the highest rank I at-

tained in two years."

While not a combat veteran himself, no lack of experience could ever deter Kubert from producing as realistic a rendering as possible. His secret lies in his research abilities and artistic theories.

"I'm interested in *everything*," Kubert points out, "but I'm not particularly a military history buff. Many people have asked me about that, having drawn and edited *Sgt. Rock* for so many years. But *Rock* was something I fell into. Military history is not a favorite or pet subject by *any* means. It was a job; any job that I take on—and I've worked in every genre of comics including humor—I attack on the same basis. Maybe I happened to be a little more successful with *Rock*.

"With *Sgt. Rock*, I investigated the uniforms. I got as many photographs as I could because I wanted to get a feeling of realism," he explains. "I did the same thing with *The Green Berets*. I was never in Vietnam, but I got thousands of photographs. When it came to doing 'Enemy Ace,' I did extensive research on World War I airplanes. I saw the way they were built and I read all kinds of books on the subject. This gives me a foundation for the kind of work I'm doing."

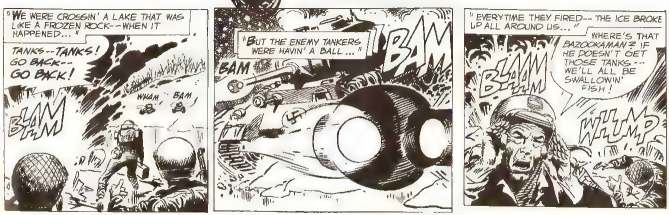
Reveals Kubert, "All the research is my attempt to get as much validity in the work as possible. As far as I'm concerned, the cartoonist is not so much an artist as a storyteller. A cartoonist's job is to communicate with his pictures the kind of feeling, emotion, dramatic effect or humor that the subject requires. So, to be as effective as possible, you have to really know the subject.

"In addition to being a storyteller, a cartoonist is a surrogate actor. He takes on the parts of the characters he's drawing, their nuances, how they react, their feelings, position, what they look like and how their emotions spell out on their faces. All of these things must be learned by the artist if he is to really inject this into his drawing and be able to communicate with effectiveness."

"*Rock* was something I fell into," confesses Kubert.

After leaving the Army, Kubert teamed up with his childhood friend and fellow Brooklyn High School of Music and Art graduate Norman Maurer to start publishing their own books under the auspices of St. John's Publishing. While at St. John's, Kubert, along with Norman and his brother Leonard Maurer, created and produced the first 3-D comics, *Mighty Mouse* and Kubert's own creation, *Tor*, kicking off a wave of similar titles produced throughout the early '50s. During this period, Kubert also freelanced for other companies including EC, where his work appeared frequently in *Frontline Combat*. Working with Harvey Kurtzman and the others at EC "didn't make me part of the team, so to speak," as Kubert puts it, "but I

**Believe it or not, Kubert maintains, "Military history is not a favorite subject by *any* means."**


"WE WERE CROSSIN' A LAKE THAT WAS LIKE A FROZEN ROCK—WHEN IT HAPPENED...
TANKS—TANKS! GO BACK—GO BACK!
WHAM
BAM
BLAM BLAM
"BUT THE ENEMY TANKERS WERE HAVIN' A BALL..."
BAM
BAM
"EVERYTIME THEY FIRED—THE ICE BROKE UP ALL AROUND US..."
WHERE'S THAT BAZOOKAMAN? IF HE DOESN'T GET THOSE TANKS—WE'LL ALL BE SWALLOWIN' FISH!
BLAM BLAM
WUMP

All Art: Joe Kubert

Art. Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

**Although he had served in the Army, Kubert had to rely on research if he wanted to take the plunge with the Rock of Easy Co.**

had done *some* work for them. I was at a point when I was figuring out what my next move would be."

That next move took him to DC where he began what would become a 25-year relationship with the company. "The first jobs I got up at DC were a number of different kinds of stories. I worked for several people, but the one that I settled down with was Bob Kanigher," says Kubert. "Bob was doing these war books like *Our Army At War* and several others, and I started there.

"Bob created the idea for the character of Sgt. Rock. I came along at that time and he felt I did a pretty good job of illustrating his thoughts. My contention is that the successful strip is a good marriage between writer and artist.

"I have the ability to see very clearly in my mind's eye those things that are described by a good writer. When Bob Kanigher would tell me a story, I saw every picture that he was describing. He wouldn't say 'close-up,' 'long shot,' 'overhead view,' but he would describe it on an emotional level and that's what I try to get into my drawings. If I can convey a strong enough feeling in the art so that a person could look at it and say, 'I know a guy who acted that way,' or 'I've seen that expression on somebody before,' then I've touched a nerve, touched something that is so recognizable that the entire story becomes believable to the reader."

Yet, the popularity of Sgt. Rock and the other characters he has drawn still baffles him. Admits Kubert, "I'm kind of surprised at the success of any of these things. I've always considered myself a very fortunate person in that I do the kind of work that I've always loved to do and I'm able to make a living at it. Looking for popularity or some recognition has not been something I expected. I like to draw and that's the pleasure I get out of it. The success that may have come along with any of the work that I've done, is like the cherry on top of the whipped cream. I never really thought about it or planned it. Why that popularity comes up, I haven't the vaguest idea."

Fighting in the trenches has never produced a shell-shocked Kubert. In fact, he thrives on wrestling with deadlines. "I think that most successful work is done under incredible pressure. When working for timewise publications, an artist has to make heavy decisions quickly. They may not be the right decisions but they are decisive ones that reflect the commitment of the particular time, which is recognized thereafter by the reader. When someone vacillates, that spontaneity disappears."

Kubert left DC briefly to draw the syndicated *Green Berets* comic strip which was written by Robin (*The French Connection*) Moore. After leaving the strip, he found himself back at DC as an artist and editor. Kubert, who claims Hal Foster's *Tarzan* as his favorite comic strip, swung into doing *Tarzan* as well as other Edgar Rice Burroughs characters for DC. He attacked the project in typical Kubert fashion—with extensive research. But, he admits, it wasn't all hard work. "I got all the Burroughs Tarzan novels and read them all before I even started drawing *Tarzan* for DC. It was reliving my childhood again. I really enjoyed it.

"Very frankly, my approach to comic-book stories has always been not to write or draw down to people, but to do what I enjoy doing and let the chips fall where they may. I think that the opening up of new material, the kind of things that are happening now, has legitimized the comic-book character."

Realizing that a great many struggling comics artists could be helped through early guidance, Kubert opened a school for artists. It's still educating newcomers 14 years later.

"The school as it works out, is like holding a tiger by the tail," he observes, "because I never expected it to be so successful. When we started, I thought we would have a maximum of say 50 or 75 students, and I could do it in my spare time. But because of the success of the people who've come out of this place—I understand that perhaps 50 percent of the people who are in the comic-book business at one time either attended or graduated from the school—I'll have to teach two days a week this year."

Alumni of the Kubert school include Tim Truman whose *Hawkworld* (CS #8) his teacher Kubert is pleased with. Steve Bissette (CS #2) graduated from the first class and now recalls

(continued on page 24)

# Classic Style

*The world's greatest works once again have four colors to a page.*

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

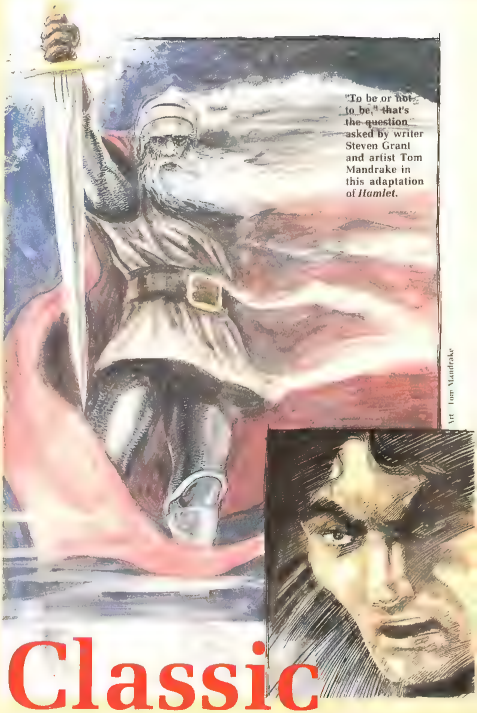
*Classics Illustrated* is back, and as part of First Comics' revival of the series, readers will see some of the world's most important literary works adapted by such names as Gahan Wilson, Kyle Baker and P. Craig Russell when the line is re-introduced in January. These new *Classics* are a joint publishing effort between First and Berkley Books. First will oversee distribution to comic book shops and the direct market, while Berkley will sell the line to bookstores.

First Comics editor Wade Roberts says four different titles will be released in January; the next two months will see two titles each, and then revert to a monthly release schedule. The initial books include Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven & Other Poems*, illustrated by Gahan Wilson, Rick Geary's adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic *Great Expectations*, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, adapted by Kyle Baker, and Herman Melville's epic *Moby Dick*, scripted by Dan Chichester and illustrated by Bill Sienkiewicz (see page 25). Roberts says their first releases were chosen to emphasize the line's diversity.

"This is so important and prestigious and prominent, that coming out with just one book wouldn't have done the line justice," says Roberts. "We decided to release four to quickly establish the line and the variety of styles that people can come to expect.

"No two of these things are going to look alike. Gahan Wilson is illustrating the complete poems—they're not abridged in any fashion. He's using different styles for each poem. For example, 'Eldorado' is four pages of full-page illustrations. Rick Geary's book is using word balloons for dialogue. Bill Sienkiewicz's paintings turned in early on were so impressive that [art director] Alex Wald and I decided it would look ludicrous to put balloons on these things, so we're using caption boxes for narrative, with quotation marks indicating dialogue. Kyle's book uses dialogue—no narration—with the dialogue below the panels. So, of the first four books, only one has balloons. They're each distinct; we're going to maintain that."

The order of release will be just as unusual. February will see Steven Grant and Tom Mandrake's adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as adapted by P. Craig Russell and Jill Thompson. Steven Grant and Dan Spiegle's version of Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* and John Snyder's adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* follow in March. The series then continues with one title per month, beginning with Mike Ploog on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in April, followed by Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* adapted by Chuck Dixon and Ricardo Villagran, Steven Grant and Eric Vincent on H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Jeff Bush's version of Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*, Rick Geary on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* adapted by Craig Russell and Jay Geldhof.



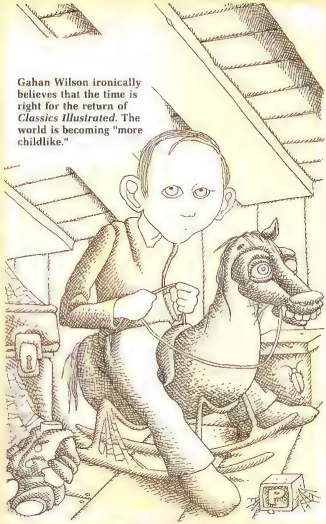
"To be or not to be," that's the question asked by writer Steven Grant and artist Tom Mandrake in this adaptation of *Hamlet*.

Art Tom Mandrake

All Classics Illustrated Art Copyright 1989, 1990 First Publishing, Inc.

Art: Bill Sienkiewicz

**Rather than deface Bill Sienkiewicz's art with word balloons, it was decided to tell *Moby Dick* in caption form.**



**Gahan Wilson ironically believes that the time is right for the return of *Classics Illustrated*. The world is becoming "more childlike."**

All Art: Courtesy First Publishing

Art: Gahan Wilson

First is attempting to vary the releases as much as possible. "Obviously, we don't want to follow a Dickens book one month with a Dickens book the following month—we're trying to come up with as diverse a mix over a period of time as we can. We don't want to repeat authors too close together or types of stories—say, two tragedies in a row. We're striving for diversity."

The original *Classics Illustrated* were much beloved by parents and educators, along with students who found themselves facing book reports on *Crime and Punishment* or *Moby Dick*, but Roberts says that these more modern, sophisticated adaptations should succeed on a level far beyond their predecessors.

"The bulk of our sales will probably be in the book market, rather than comic shops. That's going to be really attractive to artists and writers, entering the book market and being exposed to people who haven't seen their work before. The royalties, also, are a hell of an inspiration!"

Although negotiations for the rights to *Classics Illustrated* had been

Looking Glass Art: Kyle Baker

CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED
CHARLES DICKENS
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
RICK GEARY
MY FATHER'S FAMILY NAME BEING PIRRIP, AND MY CHRISTIAN NAME PHILIP, MY INFANT TONGUE COULD MAKE OF BOTH NAMES NOTHING LONGER, AND MORE EXPLICIT THAN PIP. SO I CALLED MYSELF PIP, AND CAME TO BE CALLED PIP.
AS I NEVER KNEW MY FATHER OR MY MOTHER, AND NEVER SAW ANY LIKENESS OF THEM, MY YEARS REGARDING WHAT THEY WERE LIKE WERE LIKELY TO SPRING FROM MY OWN IMAGINATION AS I STUDIED THEIR TOMBSTONES IN OLD VILLAGE CHURCHYARD.

Art: Rick Geary

**There are *Great Expectations* for the *Classics* line, and with the bulk of sales being in the book market, eight-month labors of love like Rick Geary's will pay off.**

ongoing for about two years, once the contracts were signed, things began moving very quickly. Roberts says First began approaching artists in January 1988, when the project looked like it would fall into place. In some cases, First called the artists, outlining the project and their commitment to it. But, once word of the new *Classics* began to spread, First found itself constantly fielding calls from interested pros.

"In more cases than not, the book assignments have been books the artists really wanted to do. In some cases, it's their favorite book, or a book they've long wanted the chance to illustrate, so this is a perfect opportunity for them. We want to keep this as much a labor of love as we can. Rick Geary is handling *everything* on *Great Expectations*—he has been living with that book for eight or 10 months. When a project is that time-consuming, we really want to keep it as enjoyable as we can. If folks have a good time, we'll get the best caliber of work," Roberts says the response has been so enthusiastic that First has filled out their schedule for the next two-and-a-half years.

One of the first artists recruited was *Corum* penciller Jill Thompson, who is adapting *The Scarlet Letter* in watercolors. "I was going to do *Through the Looking Glass*, but Kyle Baker wanted to do it. So, I said I would do *The Scarlet Letter* because it was a book I had always liked," Thompson says.

"I had to think back to when I read the book in school and did large term papers on it. I wondered if it should be a literal interpretation of the book, or if we should delve into it the way teachers would. But most of the interpretation is literal, and most of the literary allusion will be in ours."

**The artists were allowed their own unique visions of a tale, like Kyle Baker's somewhat darker interpretation of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.**

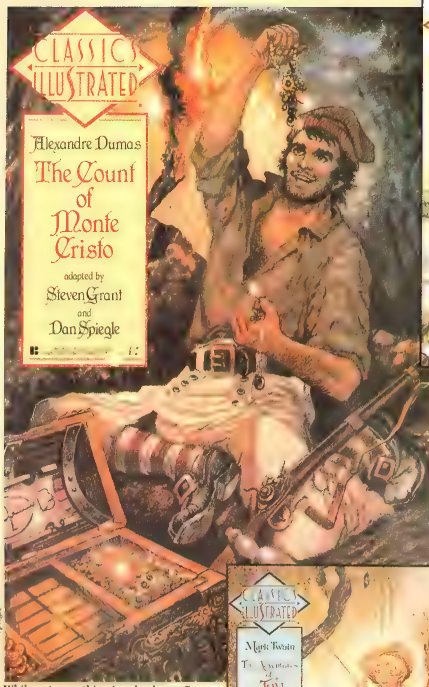
*The Scarlet Letter* also marks the first time that Thompson's watercolors have been published. "I've always enjoyed painting; I used to do it all the time when I was in art school. I always wanted the chance to do more painting—and here's a *big* chance!" she laughs. "It's like doing 2,000 little paintings!

"I get scared in the middle of it all. It took me a while to actually start painting because I was so nervous: 'If I screw this panel up, and I have four or five other panels on this page, I either have to do everything all over again, or figure out a way to fix this painting!' "

Thompson says she had only read one *Classics Illustrated* comic when she was younger, and only re-read *The Scarlet Letter* once before she began the artwork. "Once I started doing the work and looking at Craig Russell's layouts, and roughed in the type so the letterer would know how much space he had to leave for my paintings, I was re-reading it every single day!" she laughs.

Finding reference material for the Puritan tale also proved more difficult than she had anticipated. "I went to the Kent State Library, and—those darned students! There are no pictures in *any* of their books! They describe the dress and costuming, but I only found a few books that had actual pictures of costumes in them. And it was *very* difficult to find reference material for their houses, because it seemed like nobody went back far enough. So, I had to mix and match, and figure out what period it should be set in, because the year is never really specified."

Thompson says she is eager to adapt more classics, and her next title may be Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

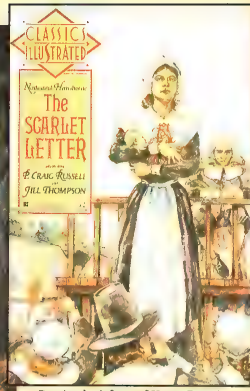



Art: Dan Spiegle

**While not everything in a book can fit into a comic, editor Wade Roberts is pleased that *The Count of Monte Cristo* conveys the original's feeling.**

Art: Mike Ploog

**Aside from the sheer volume of the piece, the artist must also contend with content. After *Tom Sawyer*, Mike Ploog has *Huckleberry Finn's* potentially offensive stereotypes to tackle.**




Art: P. Craig Russell/Watercolors: Jill Thompson

**Despite the infamy of Hester Prynn's story, Jill Thompson found very little reference material to rely on while watercoloring the book.**

"When I was in school, I was very literary. I loved English. Every time I read a book or had to do a term paper on a book, I always thought, 'I would like to draw this.' So now, I have several that I would like to do."

According to Roberts, the new *Classics Illustrated* has several purposes, the most obvious being to introduce readers to the classics. "Some of these things can be daunting. *The Count of Monte Cristo* mass market paperback is one-and-three-quarter inches thick, with *thin* paper!" he says. He also notes that their line has been endorsed already by literacy groups.

"But even beyond that, this is a chance to contribute something to the comics field. These are going into bookstores in incredible numbers, and many people will probably pick these up who haven't picked up a comic book in years, or ever, so this will help the whole industry. People will have a chance to realize that there are some really talented folks working here today, and it really truly is an art form; it's a unique form of narrative storytelling."

Despite such lofty ambitions, how can First adapt, for example, a one-and-three-quarter inch thick Alexandre Dumas novel into a 48-page comic?

"With great trepidation," smiles Roberts. "In a way, it's really daunting to oversee this.

"*The Count of Monte Cristo* is a marvelous book, but there are a number of peripheral sub-plots and characters that, while they contribute greatly to the story, are peripheral to the basic narrative. Those are things we look at with the possibility of trimming. Much of the narrative in the books is basically setting the scene and describing locales—that's a burden borne by the artwork.

"*Moby Dick* is basically a tale of obsessive madness, a man sinking further into obsessive insanity and battling against fate. It's a very com-

*(continued on page 24)*

# Gahan Wilson's Poe Thing

The artists selected for the new *Classics Illustrated* run the gamut. Some are familiar favorites, others like Mike Ploog are making a return to comics after lengthy absences, while still other artists are new to the comics field, including Jeff Bush (*Rip Van Winkle*) and Gary Gianni (*Gift of the Magi*).

Yet there is another artist contributing to the series who is familiar to countless comics fans, but who has never done a comic book—until now. Gahan Wilson is beloved by readers ranging from *Playboy* to *National Lampoon* for his ghoulish cartoons. But after decades in the business, Wilson has finally been lured by First into his first comic book work, illustrating the premiere issue of *Classics Illustrated*, featuring a number of Edgar Allan Poe's poems.

"A bunch of comic book people through the years had been trying to get me to do something or another, but I just didn't feel like doing it," says Wilson. "When First came up with this business of the *Classics*, it started to intrigue me.

"Comic books were, for a long time, aimed strictly at kids. They were marvelous for kids, and as a kid, they were terribly important to me—shaping me, as well as providing entertainment. But they were really very isolated from the non-kid world. This has changed; I don't know if it's because the adult world has become more child-like," he laughs, "though that may be part of it. I think we're also receiving things in a more visual way now than we used to. As an artist, a move to comic books feels appropriate—it just seems right."

Although his *Classics Illustrated* is his first comic book work, Wilson points out that he is actually illustrating some of Poe's poems, rather than adapting them into a story format.

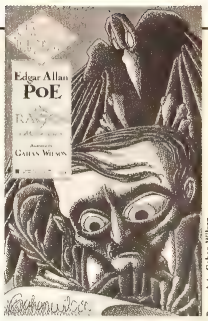
"I felt leery of simultaneously doing my first comic book and also my first adaptation of a classic, so I thought Poe would be perfect for this. First gave me free choice of anything I wanted to do, and I love Poe. Also, since most of the changes in comic books are because of Europeans, and Europeans respect Poe much more than the Americans do, I thought, 'Let's give 'em Poe!' "

The experience proved more rewarding than he had expected, Wilson says. Even though he had known and even memorized many of the poems when he was younger, he says he still discovered new meaning to such works as Poe's "Eldorado."

"What I did not expect, and it's really turned out to be the big bonus to me, is that in trying to visualize these poems, I began to understand a lot of Poe's imagery which I had not really spotted before. It was really quite humbling, and also exciting.

"In 'Eldorado,' it had never really dawned on me that the guy is saying that the shade the dying knight encounters is telling him, 'Don't let death stop you. That's just a passage—you go on from there.' I hadn't realized that's what he was saying. There are all sorts of things—some of them are subtle, some are that obvious," says Wilson.

*The Raven and other Poems* should please fans of Wilson, Poe and comics, the artist believes. "I'm doing a Gahan Wilson version. I'm doing it very much with the idea that this is essentially going to be aimed at a comic book audience, so I see my mission in doing this is primarily not to make it difficult or go over anybody's head or be too high-faluting. They're cartoon illustrations, and the idea is to hopefully make these poems more accessible than they would otherwise be. Also, frankly, I would be very happy if the kids forgot all about my book, and went on and read the poems and stories. As I see it, that is the purpose of the whole venture—to get people turned on to the *real stuff*."



Raven Art: Gahan Wilson

**"I thought Poe would be perfect for this," says Gahan Wilson of his first attempt at classic comic-book storytelling.**

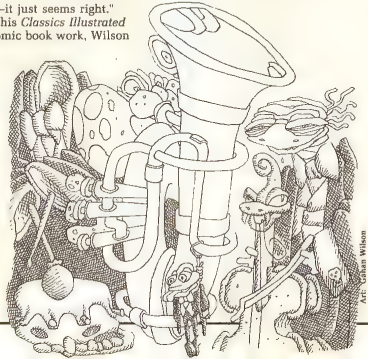
Looking beyond Edgar Allan Poe, Wilson, like many other *Classics Illustrated* artists, is planning on adapting other works.

"I'm going to do a book of Ambrose Bierce, who is considerably less known than Poe, but a very important figure in American macabre fantasy. This one's going to be a multi-layered thing. Bierce is very rough and ready, and very funny.

"This time," Wilson reveals, "I'm going to do a couple of adaptations of short stories in comic book form. I'm going to go whole hog, and do them in a style reminiscent of the old E.C. comics, because Bierce was certainly horrendous, and his *humor*! He has these fascinating short stories called 'The Fratricide Club,' which are about these horrible families that have homicidal relations with one another. So, I'm going to do one of those.

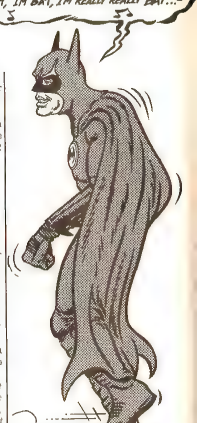
"Since Bierce himself was a great character, and visually just right for this thing, I'm going to use him as an 'Uncle Creepy' character—'Hi, this is your Uncle Ambrose'—to lead into the stories. If I can get kids turned on to Bierce," says Gahan Wilson, "that'll be very good for them, because he's sure a good corrective for the malarkey that's handed everybody!"

*—Kim Howard Johnson*


FPG Art: Gahan Wilson

**"I began to understand a lot of Poe's imagery," notes Wilson of "Conqueror Worm."**

# LETTERING



Art: David Garcia

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...Never having visited the set of TV's *Batman*, I hesitate to correct actress Yvonne Craig (CS #10) when she speaks about her Bat-experiences. However, I think it's safe to say that Adam West's stunt double was not Eubie Blake, the famous black ragtime pianist; for one thing, he was in his mid-80s at the time. The name she was reaching for was stuntman Hubie Kerns.

Tom Weaver
New York

*Oops! We're unsure if the misidentification was one of Craig's memory or COMICS SCENE's editorial process* (interview transcription/writing-editing/typesetting). *COMICS SCENE regrets the error. By the way, Tom Weaver, film historian, is a regular contributor to our sister magazines. His double-length, four-part interview with writer Richard Matheson appears in STARLOG #150-#151 and FANGORIA #89-#90.*

...Michael Keaton seems to have portrayed Batman very much the way he is portrayed in the comics: a dark, grim avenger of evil. Even Robin has been omitted, making it strikingly similar to the way Batman originally was. Sure, there is some humor in the film, but not the same humor that TV's *Batman* presented with all its campiness. As you know, the TV series really typecast the character of Batman in the eyes of the general public. However, as noted by the movie's huge sell-out, this will probably change.

So, the movie is a huge blockbuster success. However, when it comes sequel time, let's see an increase in quality, rather than a decrease. If handled properly, the sequel could be just as popular as the original. If not handled properly, disaster!

And why in the world was the Joker killed off at the movie's end? When you fall from that height, you're not likely to survive, and the Joker apparently didn't! True, the movie is a box-office smash, but I'm sure there will be many a fan expressing their bewilderment over this situation! The Joker could've been a recurring villain, but now?

Tim H. Moss
200 West B. Street
Erwin, NC 28339

...I am apologizing to Michael Keaton for ever having thought he couldn't pull off the Batman role. I was one of those who vehemently opposed his being cast for the part. However, after having seen *Batman*, I have to admit he did the role with the right intensity and complexity that the character required. There are moments in the film that were made memorable because of the humor Keaton brought to it. However, the most memorable scene occurred between Bruce Wayne and Vicki Vale in the Batcave. The emotional intensity of that moment was electrifying.

Margie A. Hoyt
Box 83657
Los Angeles, CA 90083-0657

...I never saw any of Michael Keaton's films. I went to see *Batman* and enjoyed it so much, that when I got home, I rented *Beetlejuice* and *Clean & Sober*. I was very surprised. Michael Keaton is a very versatile actor and I can't understand why no one wanted him to play the part of *Batman*. True, he didn't have many lines but, I don't believe the comic-book character was meant to be funny or glib.

I feel Keaton was an excellent choice and I hope he continues to play the Batman role for any or all of the sequels!! Thank you, Michael Keaton, for making Batman a more real and down-to-earth person!

Lisa-Marie Gaerisch
108 Mayfair Circle
Mira Loma, CA 91752

...I really liked Will Murray's article on the first Bat-man hero, Black Bat of the pulps. How about covering another pulp hero, Doc Savage?

The idea of a Fantastic Four movie is great, but to have Galactus and the Silver Surfer in the first film? Four normal people get super powers and right away they take on a cosmic demi-God who eats planets? I would think they would be more down to Earth on their first mission.

Peter Garcia
Hatillo, Puerto Rico

*For more on the Doc Savage pulps, see the last issue of the original COMICS SCENE (#11, published in 1983). The recent Savage comic (then written by Denny O'Neil) was covered just a few issues back in COMICS SCENE #2 (1988). Both articles were written by Will Murray.*

...I'm really enjoying this second chance at life that you've been given. I hope that it lasts for as long as there's a need for CS. Issue #8 was just as interesting and entertaining as the last seven. You should really be proud of what you're doing.

I have not purchased any of *Hawkworld* and quite frankly had no interest in it, me being a fan of Hawkman's. But after reading "Welcome to Hawkworld," I now regret my decision not to read it.

"Claws Unsheathed" may have excited a number of Wolverine's fans, but it excited me in a negative manner. I don't like the idea of him becoming more bestial. That will be a step back in the wrong direction for this character. He has worked too hard to develop the control that he now has. How far will they go with this? Will his fellow teammates have to hunt him down one day because he has totally lost control, just as the X-Men had to once hunt down Dark Phoenix? I don't read *Wolverine*, but I do read *X-Men* and I *don't* want to see a "dark" Wolverine.

"Can Walt Simonson Improve The World's Greatest Comic Magazine?" I don't know, but I doubt if he could do any more damage to the Fantastic Four. I have believed for some time now that this title was no longer worthy of the words "World's Greatest Comic Magazine" and have been thinking about dropping it from my reading list. I do sincerely hope that Simonson can at least increase the interest level and quality of the FF to a point that I will enjoy reading it each and every month. But he does, in my opinion, have a lot of work to do before this will happen.

Derrick Fannin
HCR 70 Box 365
Van Lear, KY 41265

...I'm glad that a live-action *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* film is in production. Unfortunately, the "heroes in a half shell" are going to be run into the ground. The same is Batman's fate. Merchandising a character too much is like stretching a joke.

The same happened to Superman. No one seems to pay much attention to the Man of Steel's current comic book adventures: his exile, his spectacular return and his problems with Matrix. I'm really impressed with the Eradicator. It shows that Superman has a human side and isn't perfect.

Why doesn't anyone talk about Starman? He has already been around a year and is an excellent character (of course, I thought the same of Booster Gold and they axed *that* series).

One more thing. I've looked in every store, bookstore, comic store and I can't find COMICS SCENE SPECTACULAR #1! Help me, please!

Trevor Aikman
Birch Hills, Sask. Canada

*You can order that issue ($3.95 + $1.55 postage) from COMICS SCENE at 475 Park Avenue South, 8th Flr. NYC, NY 10016.*

...As an integral member of the production crew of *The Return of Swamp Thing*, I found Will Murray's article on the film entertainingly written. No one can ever say Mike Uslan's introverted.

Nevertheless, I would like to mention a few people who deserve recognition for creating all you and your readers saw in the photos accompanying your article (#7, p.53).

Dean Gates and his special FX makeup crew had to suit Dick Durock (no pun intended), make him up, do his hands and feet and stand by on set with all their "monster stuff" for hours. Multiply that process for each "unman" mutant and factor in the hot, sticky, muddy, insect-infested conditions we worked in for seven weeks.

Vicky Greiff's two-and-a-half person Wardrobe Department had to clothe all the principals and 30 or so extras and stunt performers, mostly Arcane's security force. The only time she wasn't shorthanded was when Heather Locklear got her wardrobe call. Suddenly, 50 grips, electricians, scenery painters and camera assistants would descend upon her, begging to help.

Robb King designed the look of the sets, as well as the physical structures supporting them. He and his large, spirited crew created staging for the mansion and fish camp exterior and laboratory interior sets, all of which fell victim to Bob Shelley's pyrotechnics. How Robb and his people created a mysterious, moss-shrouded swamp surrounding a grassy flowered "oasis" was miraculous, considering rain and tide washed away their first effort. The underground cavern lab was constructed inside a giant, leaky, metal-roofed quonset hut of an exhibition hall at the old fairgrounds in Savannah, GA.

Last, although the photo credit line reads, "All Swamp Thing Movie Photos Copyright 1989 Lightyear Entertainment," I hope they don't mind my telling you and your readers that Russell Jeffcoat shot all or most of them.

Just in case they do mind, please withhold my name (which will be in the credits). I am not any of the people I mentioned.

Name & Address
Withheld by Request

...I love this magazine. It's the best publication on comics, but I *do* have some suggestions on how to improve it. Include a review section on upcoming comics, artists and writers. Also, include dates of when the comics you preview will come out. After I read COMICS SCENE #8, I couldn't wait to read Walt Simonson's first *FF* issue. But, I didn't know *when* I could read it.

Has anyone heard Prince's *Batman* soundtrack? It captures the movie's feeling perfectly, while being 100% entertaining. It could even pass for a comic-book's soundtrack.

I am very disappointed that *X-Men* won as best series in the CBG awards. Although it is a fairly good comic, it has suffered an incredibly large plunge in quality (like the "Inferno"-plotless trash). Comics like *Concrete*, *Wonder Woman*, *JLI* and *Batman* deserve those honors. Hopefully, *X-Men* will return to the quality it once had

Chad Harn
571 Pfaltzgraff Street
Allison, IA 50602

...If they ever make a Wolverine movie, my choice for Wolvie would be none other than Mel Gibson. Think about it...he's not very tall, he's got the accent, and he has proven that he can play a psychologically troubled character who is on the brink of completely losing it with his work in *Lethal Weapon 1* & *2*. Just build him up a bit, add some hair to his body, give him the wild hairdo, and the claws and there you are, a real live Logan!

Fred Makaj
Address Withheld

...I have been reading COMICS SCENE for a while now and I have noticed that there seems to be a bigger spotlight on movies instead of comic books. I enjoyed the article on *JLI* and *L.E.G.I.O.N. '89* though. But in COMICS SCENE #8, there was way too much on movies. It is interesting to read about a movie every once in a while, but I am getting sick of hearing about *Batman*. Consider leaving out some movie stuff.

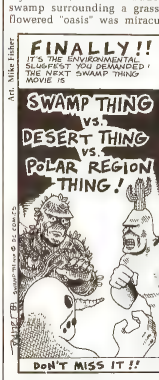
Steven Baggett
1769 Old Russeleville Pike
Clarksville, TN 37043

...The reason I'm writing this letter is to complain about something that has gotten me really pissed off lately—the quality of the big two's graphic novels and trade paperbacks. I was especially compelled to write after I read *Wolverine Saga #1*; what I expected was Wolverine history, who implanted his exoskeleton, what he was doing before James Hudson found him and basically everything about him that preceded his discovery. Instead, we got a poorly written, novel-type story that retold everything we already knew about Wolverine. Another book that helped spark this letter was Marvel's graphic novel, *The Punisher: Assassin's Guild*. The story was OK, but it wasn't any better than what you usually find in *The Punisher* or *The Punisher War Journal*, and put simply, the art sucked. I applaud the other Punisher graphic novel by Steven Grant and Mike Zeck, *Return to Big Nothing*. Everyone agrees that Grant and Zeck are the ultimate Punisher team. Unfortunately, I hear there's going to be another Punisher graphic novel named *Intruder* by Mike Baron, the regular writer of *The Punisher* series. Don't get me wrong, Baron is one of my favorite writers, but he's not exactly Alan Moore. I guess my point is that for what we're paying for these things, we should get something *really* special like *Dark Knight*, *Longbow Hunters*, *The Killing Joke*, *The Cult*, etc. not trash rip-offs like *Wolverine Saga* and the *Batman* movie adaptation.

S. Arvin
Address Unknown

...I was wondering if in the near future you could publish an article on NBC's *Alftales*. For me, this show has some of the best offbeat humor since *Rocky and Bullwinkle*. Also, enough on the *Batman* movie coverage, don't you think it's time to move on to something else?

James Smith III
1615 Main
Williston, ND 58801





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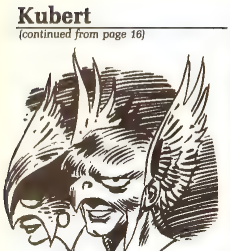
## Kubert

(continued from page 16)



his days attending school as being like "10 years of going through the ropes packed into three. It was a real crash course. At that time, it was all new and exciting to Joe. The Kubert School is the closest thing to a trade school for comics I know."

"This is *not* a comic-book school per se," Kubert stresses. "Comic books are only one facet of what people learn here about cartooning. It's an art institute for cartooning as opposed to many other schools that give a course like humor cartooning as a sideline. This school handles *all* forms of cartooning, which includes storytelling and communication in comic books, sports cartoons, greeting cards, children's book illustration and learning to use the media and material for all these things."

Two of the school's graduates are Kubert's two youngest sons Adam and Andy who, among other things, have worked on *Doc Savage* and *Sgt. Rock*. His sons didn't have it easy with their dad, Kubert reveals.

"I was probably harder on my sons than on anybody else in the school, but it's terrific to see them working on comics. It's really hard for me to believe. You cannot talk anybody into going into this profession. But once the bug hits them, you can't talk them out of it, either."

The younger Kuberts may be carrying on the tradition of half-a-century of comic-book art started by their father, but they will have to work hard to catch up to him. Fame has never meant much to Joe Kubert. He gives credit to everyone else in the business for helping him. He mentions almost all the editors, artists and others at DC, EC, St. John's and anyplace else he has worked. More than anything, he loves comic-book artwork. It doesn't matter who does it.

"Next to doing my own drawing, I like to see other people drawing. I get the pleasure out of seeing somebody do a good piece of work."

## Classics

(continued from page 20)

plex book. It takes time to hit the reader with this kind of gut feeling about Ahab's character—there are many nuances in this book. We're relying on the artist and the artwork to convey those nuances, those colors and atmospheres and undercurrents in the story," Roberts explains. "Bill has done an incredible job of portraying that, though the book is obviously being greatly abridged at 48 pages."

Although the standard size of the new *Classics* will be 48-page perfect-bound books, some books, including the second year's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, will run longer than 48 pages, and future adaptations, like *Gulliver's Travels* and *Don Quixote*, may also be expanded.

"Some people might argue that *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Moby Dick* should have been done as larger-sized books, but I'm looking at leaving the reader with the same feelings and information that's in the book, and we're doing that with both *Monte Cristo* and *Moby Dick*."

Because First was forced to get the project underway so quickly, all of the initial titles chosen are in the public domain. Roberts says there wasn't time to search for the owner of the copyrights, and negotiate for rights to adapt many modern classics, but they are quickly reaching the point where they hope to adapt works by such authors as Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and F. Scott Fitzgerald. They will also not hesitate to adapt works that have been done frequently in the past, such as *Frankenstein*, because of the wider circulation the new *Classics* will have.

Controversial works will be considered when rights can be obtained for books such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. "We might do books where there is a great deal of violence, or possibly some intimate situations, but there are ways to address things like that without being graphic or restless. We're going to be faithful and true to the intentions of the book and the author. There are quite a few judgment calls here," says Roberts, who explains that all of their problems don't involve modern sex and violence.

"*Huckleberry Finn* is going to be tough, because of Twain's references to blacks. Mike Ploog—who is doing his first comics work in many years—also adapted *Tom Sawyer* for our first year, but *Huckleberry Finn* is going to be considerably tougher. Each of these titles contains a statement pledging that these are *accurate* representations of the original work, faithful and true to the intentions of the author. Thank God it's a year from now, so I can consider how we're going to approach that title. I don't want to rewrite Twain, and I know Mike finds it terribly devastating to even think about changing Twain. On the other hand, we don't want to *offend* people."

First even has the rights to *Classics Juniors*, stories aimed at younger readers. They are able to reprint the originals or else do new adaptations, but Roberts, who says they may do a combination of the two, notes that any decision is probably a year away.

Although First has a list of all of the novels adapted originally by *Classics Illustrated*, Roberts says they aren't necessarily going by that in selecting works to adapt. "One rule of thumb we consider when scheduling titles is that a classic by definition is something that has withstood the test of time. That's rather nebulous: How long is the test of time? The other qualification is that a classic is relevant. There were a number of adaptations done that were probably relevant in the '40s and '50s, but are now less relevant than other works."

The new titles should prove to be significantly different from their predecessors—both the original *Classics* and the short-lived *Marvel Classics Comics Series* of the late '70s.

"I don't want to defame the previous line—they were quite good at the time, but things have changed. The artists working in the field now are more sophisticated and styles have changed. Comics aren't really locked into a rigid format the way they were in previous years. There's much more freedom to experiment in style and layout, and the mechanics and printing are much better.

"While the original *Classics Illustrated* were quite good for what they were at the time, some of them were lacking the same kind of feeling one got from the book," says Wade Roberts. "I've got a copy of the old adaptation of *Moby Dick*, and it's a nice little job. A lot of the dialogue is lifted straight from the book, but *Moby Dick* was presented as a swashbuckling men-at-sea book with sailors chasing a whale and they happen to have a captain who is demented. You *don't* get the sense that this guy is burning inside, and is insanely obsessed. The old adaptation *doesn't* leave you with the same feeling the book does—unlike the one we're doing."

But like their predecessors, the new *Classics Illustrated* will continue to feature stories by the world's greatest authors. This time around, though, they'll be adapted by some of the greatest pros in comics.

# The Substance of Style

## Part 1

*While others debate his ethnic merits, Bill Sienkiewicz shows his work in a different light*

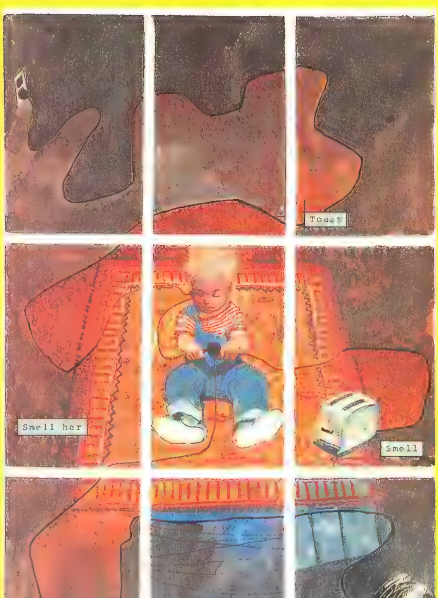
BY TASIO BERNARD

*Bill Sienkiewicz walked past his fans and fellows at the 20th annual San Diego Comic Con like a conquering hero.*

*Hands reached out to touch his. Knots of people gathered around him. Confident and hip-looking, wearing a single earring like a pirate, he moved among them gracefully, accepting his due.*

*It wasn't always like this. From his beginnings on* Moon Knight, *and sporadically as he experimented with* New Mutants, Elektra: Assassin, Brought to Light *and a flurry of covers in his slick, painterly style, he has been branded as an imitator of his betters, a subject that still rankles even now when he is considered on the cutting edge of cartooning. His four-issue* Stray Toasters *last year was an enigma, an angry splash of color that delighted some, angered others, and puzzled everyone. It's about mothers, sons, possessed electrical appliances and the stifling of individuality. Or maybe it's not; who's to say? Sienkiewicz says you have to draw your own conclusions.*

*This interview was conducted at a noisy bar outside the Comic Con, where Sienkiewicz seemed to know people at every table. Those he didn't know seemed to know him, and watched respectfully as he passed them. Over drinks, he talked about the old criticisms, the feverish reactions to* Stray Toasters, *and his intense interest in his new project with Alan Moore. But what creeps up often in his conversation is his connection to the insecure, alienated kid he once was, and his long road to personal and professional acceptance.*




Stray Toasters Art Courtesy Epic Comics

All Art Bill Sienkiewicz

All Moby Dick Art Courtesy & Copyright 1979, 1995 First Publishing, Inc.

**"I invented my own stories, a world I was in control of," says Sienkiewicz of his early childhood, which echoes within *Stray Toasters*.**

**COMICS SCENE:** When did you first put pen to paper, and why?

**BILL SIENKIEWICZ:** I first began drawing as a child, even before going to kindergarten. I remember in kindergarten drawing an Eskimo, and the other kids saying, "What a horrible drawing"—but the other kids *couldn't* draw something like that! I thought, "This is great!" I was a fat kid, a pudge, and this was something I could do that they *couldn't*. That's how it started. I drew comics before I knew what they were. I was lonely a lot. On weekends, I went to visit my grandparents and I was ostracized for being fat. So, I kept to myself and drew. I invented my own stories, a world I was in control of.

**CS:** What sort of world was that?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** My early stories were private-eye stuff, mysteries. No superheroes until four years later. They were everything I wasn't—an alter-ego that was thin, adult. There was time travel, fantasy elements to it. I was practicing, getting stuff out. My parents were encouraging, but they had a working-class background—my grandfather was a coal miner, my father worked for AT&T, my mom was a housewife. They felt I should have a real job. Mom went to school meetings, and the teacher would say, "Bill draws all the time." My mom would say, "I know, I really wish he would stop that." Mom never knew what the drawing meant. I installed antennae on TVs, did construction, but this ultimately was what I wanted to do.

**CS:** When did you quit TV repair and go into drawing whole-heartedly?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** I did odd jobs as a teenager, went to Newark School of Fine Industrial Art for two years. I didn't graduate, just got my portfolio together. I didn't want to be stuck with people pumping gas. I was a smug little bastard. I walked in [to Marvel] without an appointment and got my first job on *Moon Knight*. It was also the first job for the colorist as well [Steve Oliff]. I did four years of that. I see that as the seeds of...the beginning. The style was reminiscent of Neal Adams, and suddenly, I got lumped in with these clones. I remember feeling completely unseen, like the fat little kid I had been. I felt obliterated, full of anger. I was trying a whole lot of different techniques to validate myself and my work. There was no respect for the medium and for what I was doing. There was the issue of acceptance, plus a lot of psychology at stake. I was holding onto work as a security blanket. It forced me to find out more things about myself.

**CS:** After *Moon Knight*, which direction did you take?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** At the end of *Moon Knight*, I did *Fantastic Four* for Marvel, and *The New Mutants*. I really wanted illustration work. It wasn't the same kind of investment of time as doing a full 22 pages, and would give me a chance to experiment.

**CS:** Your style has been lumped in variously with that of Neal Adams, Bob Peake and Ralph Steadman. What would you call your style today?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** Today I'm a cubist, or today I'm this or that. Doing covers allows a great deal of experimentation for me. In some ways, I was back to that feeling of not being accepted. There was incredible pressure for me to be liked for myself, as if my work and I were inseparable. I became a perfectionist. I would get exhausted from keeping up an armor. If I could just do it, without screwing myself into the ground... It took two years before sketch work interested me more than my other work. There's no pressure in my sketchbooks. I decided to fight to have that happen in my work, letting down barriers, saying: Here it is, warts and all. It's a striving for

**While the previous *Classics Illustrated* had presented *Moby Dick* as just a swashbuckling adventure, Bill Sienkiewicz's delves deeper.**

Moon Knight. Trademark & Copyright 1983, 1985 Marvel Entertainment

**Before his solo work on *Stray Toasters*, Sienkiewicz expressed his feelings of alienation with "Slow Dancing" in *Epic Illustrated*.**

Slow Dancing Art. Copyright 1986 Bill Sienkiewicz/Epic Magazine

honesty, rather than getting ready for a Saturday night date in terms of visuals, having everything perfect. It's all tied up with *Stray Toasters*.

**CS:** Where did you get the idea for *Stray Toasters*?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** It wasn't any one single point. It actually started about 5 years ago as a robot story. I was influenced by Isaac Asimov. I started to read more psychology books and become more aware. It also had to do with a cathartic thing in terms of childhood experiences, and working things through. In that way, comics are really like art therapy. Peeling away the layers, the facades, getting down to the essence. There's a rage to it, a thrashing. I hope that there's a universality and objectivity, although I think it's a much more subjective work than something like the adaptation of *Dune* or *Moon Knight*. This is much more personal.

**CS:** *Stray Toasters* takes a dim view of motherhood, not to mention kitchen appliances. Did your Mom read it?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** I don't think she ever did: I gave it to her, but she never commented on it. She just died recently; she didn't see it after all.

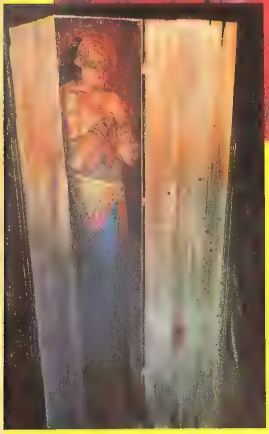
**CS:** Well, maybe she did read it and wasn't sure how to respond. What's the deal with all those possessed appliances?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** The fact that machines are associated with the kitchen, and mother is associated with the house, kitchens. Plus machines are non-human. A toaster is basically something you plug in and warm up. This is a story of dehumanization, where humanity and emotions are not dealt with. People are

**Beginning with a style reminiscent of Neal Adams, Sienkiewicz soon felt that he became lost in the shadows with *Moon Knight*.**

...SAID SHE TRUSTED ME TO FIND A HIDEOUT WHERE NOBODY WOULD LOOK FOR HER.
SHE DIDN'T SAY OUT LOUD, OF COURSE.
CHRIST, LOOK AT HER DOWN THERE.
...HEART-SHAPED WATER-BED, JUST LIKE THEY ADVERTISE...
NO, SHE WOULDN'T TALK OUT LOUD, THAT'S TOO OBVIOUS FOR ELEKTRA.
SUPER-POWERED NINJA—THAT'S RIGHT, NINJA, AS IN ASSASSIN—THEY TALK TO YOU IN YOUR HEAD.
AT LEAST THIS ONE DOES.
AND SHE READS MY MIND.
SHE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT SHE'S DOING TO ME.

ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN artwork & copyright 1986, 1987 Marvel Entertainment



"Comics are really art therapy," reveals Sienkiewicz. "Peeling away the layers, the facades, getting down to the essence."

relegated to the position of machines—they're turned on, warmed up and they function, all the while denying a certain emotional core. If the element of the toaster is burned out, you pull the plug and toss it, which is another analogy for people.

**CS:** *Stray Toasters* isn't the first time you both wrote and drew, though.

**SIENKIEWICZ:** I wrote and drew a story called "Slow Dancing" for the last issue of *Epic Illustrated*. In a certain way, it's about the same thing as *Stray Toasters*. In the story, touching and sexuality is illegal because of society's structure. People get together in clandestine meetings and they slow dance, which is a big deal, because physicality at all is frowned upon. *Stray Toasters* is part of a book I was going to work on, to be called *Alien Nation*, about how people don't fit in but want to.

**CS:** It seems that the social deprivations of your childhood have crept into the themes of your work today.

**SIENKIEWICZ:** The problem is, these things stay with you. I don't know how much of the eternal viewpoint it forms, but it can definitely color or discolor your performance or the quality of your life. I don't know if it goes so far as to *control* your life.

**CS:** Issues of control are central in *Stray Toasters*, where possessed appliances take over people and can rape and murder them. And the fact that you both wrote and drew it shows a degree of personal control, is being in control important to you?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** Having control is very liberating, also very frightening.

**Working with Frank Miller on *Elektra: Assassin* allowed Sienkiewicz to give a different subtext to superheroics.**

because many limitations are internal. The walls you put up are internal, it has to do with facing fears of exposure. The point is not to dump a load of shit, but to make a good story, in terms of pushing a kind of envelope. The integrity and honesty of the work is up to me.

**CS:** How do you work? How do you organize your ideas?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** I work all different ways. Sometimes, I'll just write. Other times, the visuals will hit me. Maybe not exact visuals, but counterpoint visuals. I try not to deal with redundancies.

**CS:** Your work is very personal. Is it difficult to share creatively? Who do you like to work with?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** The ones who take the time. There's an attrition rate—you lose people and other people come aboard. There's a vocabulary and a dialogue that goes on and never really ends. You try to find people with a simpatico point-of-view.

**CS:** *Stray Toasters* is, shall we say, a challenging read. What sort of reactions have you gotten?

**SIENKIEWICZ:** A wide variety of reactions, from, "Looks great, can't read it," to, "It's one of the most groundbreaking things I've ever seen done." Certain reviews gave it a Grade C, which is a juvenile sort of thing. Then, you have an outside source like the *London Times*, which gave it a very positive review, something about "the prickly adult potential of the form."

**CS:** Why do you think you've gotten so much flak?

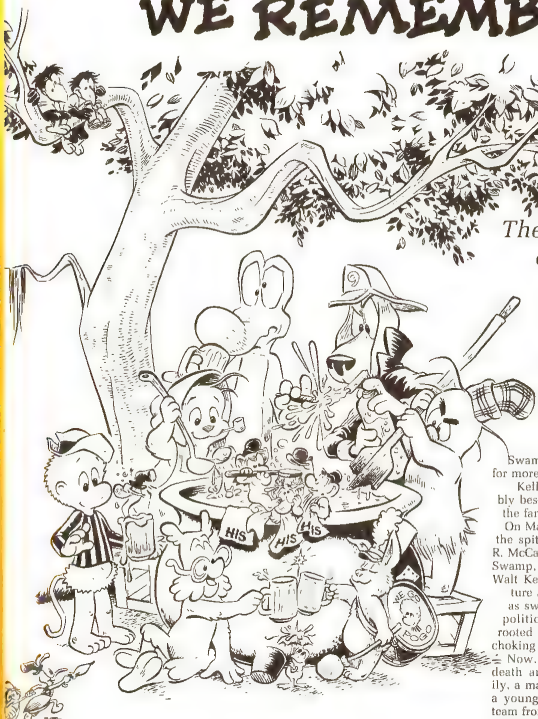
**SIENKIEWICZ:** There's a certain contingent that only wants mutants and superheroes and wants all their thinking done for them. I would much rather work in dialogue and give the reader more credit and impetus to work and be more involved, give them credit for having intelligence. This is what comics are all about. It pisses me off because the ones who are complaining are not the ones who are doing them.

**CS:** And yet you have worked on various superheroes.

**SIENKIEWICZ:** I have no interest in it now. Superhero stuff becomes a metaphor for certain things. But you always have that mask, and it's like, why not cut out the middleman and just attack the issue without the mask? Why does a story about famine or hunger have to be about a superhero's efforts to prevent it? Why not just do it about famine or hunger? The issue itself is important enough without the superfluous stuff.

TO BE CONTINUED

# IN POGO WE REMEMBER




*The lights are on once again in Okefenokee Swamp. But would Walt Kelly like the party?*

By BARRY GANTT & SANDRA PUNGOR

In the early 1940s, a shy, unassuming possum was busy paying his dues as a secondary character in Walt Kelly's "Bumbazine and Albert the Alligator" feature in *Animal Comics*. His name was Pogo, and his big break came in 1948 when the *New York Star* ran the first *Pogo* comic strip on October 4. His creator, Walt Kelly, was 35 years old and already a successful comic-book artist and veteran of the Disney Studios. The eponymous possum and scores of other denizens of the Okefenokee Swamp went on to delight readers for more than 25 years.

Kelly, who died in 1973, is probably best remembered for politicizing the fantasy world of the comic strip. On May 1, 1953, Simple J. Malarkey, the spitting image of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, arrived in Okefenokee Swamp, and over the next 20 years, Walt Kelly's scathing political caricature and satire grew thick and lush as swamp flora. By the late 1960s, political commentary was firmly rooted as the strip's central theme, choking out less controversial topics.

Now, 15 years after Walt Kelly's death and *Pogo*'s end, Kelly's family, a major newspaper syndicate and a young, unknown writer and artist team from Chicago took a huge leap of faith. After almost three years of complicated negotiations, the *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate signed a contract with the Kelly family, artist Neal Sternecky and writer Larry Doyle to revive *Pogo*. Their effort made its debut on January 8, 1989 across the country. Don Michel, *LA Times* Syndicate vice-president and editor, says the new strip is doing

spectacularly well. "It's in more than 300 papers daily and Sunday. We are now getting self-generated calls from editors wanting to run it, which is fairly unusual," Walt Kelly would appreciate the irony.

Since Kelly died, his widow Selby has been working hard to keep *Pogo* alive. Her own background in animation taught her the complications involved with copyrights, and she knew that if they weren't handled properly, *Pogo* could pass into oblivion. As executrix of Kelly's estate, Selby held the copyright to some but not all of the vast *Pogo* empire. Upon the expiration of the original copyrights, each of Kelly's survivors held equal rights to his work. In order to make the *Pogo* revival a project that a syndicate could find workable, a corporation was formed, consisting of sons and daughters of Papa Walt's three families. Selby Kelly is a member of the board, but has turned her voting privileges over to her son Scott.

*LA Times* Syndicate's Don Michel had been looking for new comic strip ideas, with the thought in the back of his mind that the time might be right for *Pogo*'s return. A whole generation of readers had never seen *Pogo* in the newspapers, and Michel had always had a great deal of respect for Kelly's work. The Kelly family was at this time working on setting up Okefenokee, Glee & Perloo, Inc. (O G P I), the corporation named in Kelly's honor that was to hold the copyright to *Pogo*.

Some time earlier, Larry Doyle and Neal Sternecky had submitted a comic strip called *Escaped from the Zoo* to the *LA Times* Syndicate which caught Don Michel's interest. He filed it with the conviction that if his syndicate was to ever bring back *Pogo* or launch a similar strip, Doyle and Sternecky were the people he wanted to write and draw it. These parallel energies eventually converged and became *Walt Kelly's Pogo by Doyle & Sternecky.*

**Pogo is but one of the multitude of characters that the new artists must deal with in the Okefenokee Swamp.**

# POGO
## our eponymous possum.

Larry Doyle and Neal Sternecky seem on the surface to be an unusual choice to carry on the legacy of one of the greatest comic creators of all time. Sternecky, 27, and Doyle, 29, were still in grade school when Walt Kelly died, and had little awareness of *Pogo* while growing up. The two met at the University of Illinois and for three years, produced a comic strip together for the campus newspaper. During this time, they discovered Kelly's work and, inspired by it, tried to incorporate some of his qualities into their own strip about fraternity life. The results of their stylistic emulation and intuitive feel for the ambiance of Kelly's *Pogo* impressed Don Michel and the OGPI principals enough to take a chance on the pair.

Doyle remembers, "We found out that the family did want to bring back *Pogo* exactly the way that it was, and so we decided that we would try to do it. We got a call from the *LA Times* Syndicate, when it first became known that *Pogo* was coming back." Adds Sternecky, "This project has taken several years to come to be. I wasn't entirely happy with the early drawings, but eventually, I got it down and ready for the papers."

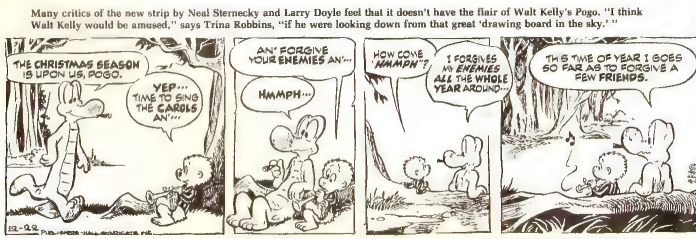
Selby Kelly is pleased with their efforts, noting, "It's done quite nicely. I do nitpick a great deal; I'm on them with hammer and tong about anything that I think *isn't* like Kelly's work. One of the troubles with Kelly is that he changed things a lot—he would have what seemed like a rule about something, and then he changed that.

"I would say, 'You're not drawing that character like you think it is,' and Neal would say, 'Well, look in Book So-and-So, you'll find it drawn that way.' Well, sometimes Kelly was ill, and sometimes he was in a hurry, and sometimes he just felt like using his animation experience, elongating characters, stretching them out, and so on. In some cases, it would work fine, and in some cases, it wouldn't.

"So, these boys didn't need to learn much from me, and they really are wonderful about my corrections. We can discuss things even heatedly—but no one gets too angry about anything."

Kelly's *Pogo* had admirers all across the United States, in all walks of life. Readers could find him in some 400 national papers. But the college campus of the '50s was the scene of a particularly intense Pogomania.

**Many critics of the new strip by Neal Sternecky and Larry Doyle feel that it doesn't have the flair of Walt Kelly's *Pogo*. "I think Walt Kelly would be amused," says Trina Robbins, "if he were looking down from that great 'drawing board in the sky.' "**


THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IS UPON US, POGO.
YEP... TIME TO SING THE CAROLS AN'...
AN' FORGIVE YOUR ENEMIES AN'...
HMMPH...
HOW COME "HMMPH"?
I FORGIVES MY ENEMIES ALL THE WHOLE YEAR AROUND.
THIS TIME OF YEAR I GOES SO FAR AS TO FORGIVE A FEW FRIENDS.

12-22-69 Original Pogo Strip - Bx & Copyright 1969 Walt Kelly

When Pogo's friends decided he should run for president in 1952, students wearing "I Go Pogo" (a play on "I Like Ike") buttons held boisterous rallies which became near riots. *Pogo* was loved by students and faculty alike. Ben Eisenstat, a former instructor at the Philadelphia College of Art, was a great fan. Now a major art collector, painter and writer for *Step-by-Step Graphics* magazine, Eisenstat believes the new *Pogo* deserves a look.

"I think the new guys are self-conscious. Making up words, that's a little too cute...and the artwork just doesn't have the action Kelly had.

"But they should get a chance. They'll need to expand on the subjects they're covering. It's drawn well, but it just doesn't have the zip or the confidence Kelly had in his art. However, it *is* fun to look at a strip—compared to many of the others around today—that has a lot of writing in it. The lettering is fine, and emulating the calligraphy style that Kelly had for some of his characters is a feature I like. I look forward to seeing more, to see if they can maintain a high standard."

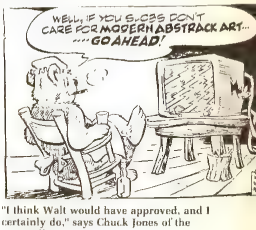
Not everyone has welcomed Pogo. Albert, Churchy and the rest of the gang back. The return of a beloved strip, whose fans tend to be as opinionated as Kelly was, raises the question of whether a comic strip should be continued at all after the death of its creator. Don Michel is sensitive to the critics. "Some people have felt that *Pogo* should have been left alone, but we feel that the new strip's strength is in Larry and Neal. The Kelly family feels the same way. Even before any new strips were seen, people were complaining that *Pogo shouldn't* come back. That was unfair criticism. Larry and Neal certainly have the right to be seen and judged on their own merits. Some of our competitors had poked fun, which I thought terribly unfair. Some people virtually closed their minds before they ever saw it, and I think you could trace who they were from recent things in the comics pages."

One such critic, B. Kliban, self-described journeyman cartoonist for *Playboy* and the man who set off the avalanche of cartoon cats marketing in the mid-1970s, became a *Pogo* fan when he discovered the strips reprinted in books after they had stopped running in the newspaper pages. He came late to *Pogo* fandom but stays loyal to the original: "I wish [Doyle & Sternecky] well, but I think that Walt should be left alone. I realize that money is the excuse for everything these days, but it's sort of like digging up your granny. I mean, it's their right to do the strip, but I feel like maybe his contribution should stay his contribution, and somebody else could move on with something else rather than exhume *Pogo*."

Some critics of the new *Pogo* feel the craftsmanship in the drawing and the writing is to blame for the chilly reception accorded the feature. Others feel this is too harsh a judgment considering that Walt Kelly was a working artist for longer than new artist Neal Sternecky has been alive.

Negative responses to the artwork seem largely to have come from other artists. Reader response from the old fans of Kelly's work has tended to focus more on the story: complaints that the strip is moving too slowly, that their favorite character or running gag has not been revived, or that

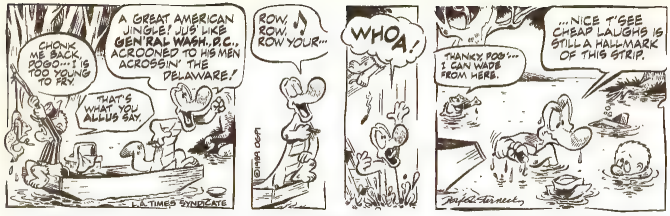
5/18/88 Original Pogo Strip ® & Copyright 1989 Walt Kelly




**"I think Walt would have approved, and I certainly do," says Chuck Jones of the post-Kelly *Pogo* age.**

**Things have changed. With this new strip, not everyone is going Pogo.**

All New Pogo Art: Copyright 1988, 1989 OGPI All New Pogo Art, Neal Sternecky


CHONK ME BACK, POGO—I'S TOO YOUNG TO FRY.
A GREAT AMERICAN JINGLE! JUS' LIKE GEN'RAL WASH., D.C., ACROONED TO HIS MEN ACROSSIN' THE DELUWARE!
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALLUS SAY.
L.A. TIMES SYNDICATE
ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR...
WHOA!
THANKY, POG'... I CAN WADE FROM HERE.
...NICE T'SEE CHEAP LAUGHS IS STILL A HALLMARK OF THIS STRIP.

**"It's not Walt Kelly. At its best, the current one is OK," notes Trina Robbins.**

Pogo Art: Courtesy Gary Gantt & LA Times Syndicate

the new strip seems too much like "remedial *Pogo*," covering ground already explored.

Each of these examples, though frustrating to the longtime fans, has its positive qualities, too. Doyle and Sternecky are introducing *Pogo* to a new generation of readers unfamiliar with Walt Kelly's work. Characters must be solidly established before complex plots can be woven. Few comic strips today contain more than four or five regular characters. The cast of *Pogo* includes nine major characters, the so-called "Inner Circle" which consists of: Pogo Possum, Churchy La Femme, Porkypine, Pup Dog, Miz Ma'm'selle Hepzibah, Albert Alligator, Howland Owl, Beauregard Bugleboy and Miz Beaver. The "Outer Circle" is comprised of 29 less frequently appearing critters such as P.T. Bridgeport, the bombastic bear who spoke in P.T. Barnumesque calligraphy, Deacon Muskrat and the Three Bats (Bewitched, Bothered and Bemildred).

Criticizing the quality of the work offers some concrete justification for the moral conviction that this resurrection of *Pogo* just isn't right. "The real issue is: Should it be done or not?" Sternecky says. "If you accept the fact that it should be done, then you move on to the question of the quality of the work. But for the people who just don't think it's a good idea that *Pogo* be brought back, then by definition, they're going to be critical.

"It's getting better, with the newer stuff we've been doing. Most of the criticism I hear is that we dove into the political material too early, but I feel that was important for us to do, to establish for people that we are going to be political, as much as Kelly was. A problem is the lead time for a strip—we're working with the syndicate to cut the time down, to afford us maximum topicality."

Trina Robbins has been a cartoonist since 1966 for Marvel Comics, DC and many others. She is not alone in considering Kelly one of the all-time great comic artists, along with George Herriman, Milton Caniff and George McManus. "It's no Walt Kelly," Robbins says of the new *Pogo*. "At its best, the current one is OK. It's very sad when they bring back strips that were truly great, and now it's done by someone else, and they just turn out OK. I would hope that this doesn't keep happening. I think we should leave well enough alone."

Robbins echoes the disappointment of many comics pros, as well as discriminating fans who appreciate the comic strip as an art form, in the general decline in quality of the medium.

"Of course, comparing [the new *Pogo*] to some of the others that are running, this is actually great by today's terms," says Robbins. "But that's a very depressing statement about where daily comic strips are today. Most of them are just awful."

The return of *Pogo* provides a point of reference for those who feel a general discontent with the state of newspaper comic art today: The reduction in size of strips, the simplification of artwork, the "dumbing down" of the writing and the tendency toward comics existing solely as a framework for merchandising are all qualities that reflect our culture's changing values.

Peter Winter, formerly internationally syndicated cartoonist for the *LA Times* Syndicate, is currently a fine arts sculptor living in San Francisco.

"I've looked at the current one more out of curiosity than anything else, but I've lost interest in the new *Pogo*. It seems to me a kind of cheesy redo of the old material. It doesn't come across to me at all. There seems to be a lot of repetition, which turns me off.

"The artist gets a big space on the Sunday colors, and he just doesn't use it," Winter complains. "I actually feel sorry for all the artists nowadays, as they don't get the space they should to

*(continued on page 60)*

**"It's difficult for a strip like the new *Pogo*, which has a more literary outlook, to find a large readership," says *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz. "The two new artists are doing a beautiful job of duplicating Kelly's drawing style."**

READ THE NEWSPAPERS LATELY, ALBERT?
I GUV 'EM UP. COMICAL STRIPS GOT SO TEENSY THEY HURT MY EYEBONES.
L.A. TIMES SYNDICATE ©1989
AIN'T MISSED MUCH, FROM WHAT I HEARS...
LULU ARFIN' NANNY STILL GOT HER EYES ALL BLONG OUT?
...PAPERS IS FULL O' GUMMINT HIGH AN' LOW JINKS, NEW CLEAR MISSIVES, HOT 'N' COLD RUNNIN' WARS...
HARDLY SEEM LIKE WE BEEN AWAY.
YOU AIN'T SEEN THE TUNA FISH.
THE HOWL WALT KELLY!

# Under Da Sea

*When a lonely prince meets "The Little Mermaid", it's Disney magic.*

By DAVID HUTCHISON

With this year's release of its 28th animated feature film, the Walt Disney Studios appears to be well on the road to making good its promise of releasing one new animated feature a year. Walt Disney himself voiced similar ambitions, but it was a dream that even he was not able to sustain for more than a few years. Since each film takes many years to produce, several projects must be in simultaneous development at the studio, and this requires a large and growing staff. But even with a vigorous new recruitment program and a work force that has nearly quadrupled over the past four years, Disney producers have found scheduling the increased workload to be a tricky task.

In fact, when producer/director John Musker wanted to start production for *The Little Mermaid*, he found that no animators were available. "When we started on this film, we went through the department and, basically, found that we couldn't have *anybody*," explains co-director Ron Clements. "They were all either working on *Oliver & Company* or *Roger Rabbit*. We were desperate to find animators to get things going."

Operating on a version of the old Disney unit system, Musker and Clements assembled a core staff of directing animators who would each direct their own teams of animators, assistants and in-betweeners. With most of the existing animation staff committed to other projects, the search for new artists immediately began to extend outside the studio. "There was an animator we had heard about, a Canadian, Duncan Majoribanks, who had never worked at Disney before," Clements continues, "but we heard he was really good. We called him in, looked at his reel and got him started working on some experimental animation with Sebastian the crab," who is almost a reverse Jiminy Cricket. While Jiminy would have dragged the wayward Ariel back to her father to "to do what she oughtta" like a good little fish, Sebastian does everything possible to help Ariel succeed with the human Prince Eric. Of course, Sebastian knows he's crab cakes if the diabolical Ursula wins. "We liked what Duncan did and he joined Disney in 1986 to become one of the film's key directing animators. That was, basically, a stroke of luck."

Majoribanks, an alumnus of Canada's famed animation school at Sheridan College, has worked as an assistant at Hanna-Barbera and freelanced animation for commercial spots featuring such well-known characters as Tony the Tiger and Snap, Crackle and Pop. He was also involved as an animator on the "Family Dog" episode of Steven Spielberg's *Amazing Stories*.

"We wanted people like Glen Keane," notes Clements, "but we couldn't get him for a time because he was occupied with *Oliver*. When we finally got him, we gave him some key scenes with Ariel, the star of the film. We knew who we wanted right from the start, but we had to wait for them—people like Andreas Dejas and Mark Henn.

"Ruben Aquino—who joined Disney in 1982 as an in-betweener

Mark Henn, the directing animator for Ariel, wanted to keep her movements flexible and fluid, so she didn't just look like a human in a fish suit.

on *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, moved up to assistant and later animator on *The Black Cauldron*—oversaw a staff of four animators assigned to the sea witch Ursula. Casting-wise, it might have seemed more natural to give Glen Keane the sea witch and to give Ruben the mermaid, but Glen, who had put so much into Ratigan in *Great Mouse Detective* wanted to do something different. Ruben is an up-and-coming animator with strong drafting skills, and John and I thought that he had the right mental attitude to handle Ursula's tentacles, a job that would drive most people insane."

For the 1986 feature *The Great Mouse Detective*, Aquino mainly handled Mr. Dawson and Mrs. Judson. He was also one of several animators on Disney's award-winning computer-generated short, "Oil and Lipstick."

"Some initial animation on Ursula was done by Rob Minkoff," adds John Musker, "but he left early in production to work on the Roger Rabbit short, 'Tummy Trouble'. Rob had studied a lot of nature footage of octopi and decided he could turn those slithering tentacles into a walk. Minkoff started with the tentacles' sliding whiplash motion, put some weight in it, retimed the action and added a woman's body. When Ruben started developing the movement, studio chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg, who was keeping a very close watch on the production, became enthused with the character's performance and asked for more.

"Ruben started by blocking out Ursula's body and head movements with only a rough idea of what the tentacles would do. After finishing the character animation, he would go back and take a whole other pass through the scene to animate the tentacles. Full animation, too, with muscular movement, a sense of weight, grab and pull. A tremendous job. The original design had eight tentacles, but if you look closely, you'll see there are only six because it was such a nightmare. Aquino's work really pays off, though, because the motion gives Ursula a special quality among the Disney villainesses. It's one of those things that works so much better in animation than in live action."

The final production staff included six directing animators—Mark Henn, Glen Keane, Duncan Majoribanks, Ruben Aquino, Andreas Dejas and Matt O'Callaghan—who were charged with creating the characters' performances and overseeing the teams of artists assigned to bring the storyboards to life. Since nearly 40 minutes of *The Little Mermaid* takes place underwater, all of the artists had to re-orient themselves to a floating world; the sense of weight they normally strived to achieve in their drawings had to be radically shifted. Characters were given a natural buoyancy and the effort of swimming against strong currents influenced the animators' approach to a scene.

Director/writer Ron Clements and producer/director/writer John Musker supervise the dialogue recording sessions with Jodi Benson, Ariel's voice.

Sebastian (animated by Duncan Majoribanks' and Aquino's team) helps Ariel win over Prince Eric.

It's traditional at Disney for animators to make extensive use of life study classes. In the early stages of production, a large aquarium was moved into the animation building and artists with sketch pads frequently gathered to study and draw the exotic fish. Research photos from *National Geographic* and reference

Ariel and her fishy friend Flounder get a lesson in the use of human artifacts from a seagull named Scuttle, voiced by Buddy Hackett.

All Little Mermaid Photos & Art: Copyright 1989 the Walt Disney Company

books were plastered on the walls of the animators' rooms.

Live action models also proved useful for study purposes. Sherri Stoner, a talented young actress/performer with Los Angeles' premier comedy improvisation group, The Groundlings, was called in to model for the title mermaid. The artists were able to study her movements as she swam about in a clear glass tank, eight feet deep and filled with water.

Directing animator Mark Henn credits Stoner with inspiring some of Ariel's facial expressions as well. "She was able to bring to the character a unique and believable spark which we may not have thought of otherwise," affirms Henn. "Little things like the way she bites her lip were incorporated into Ariel's personality and helped bring the character to life."

Mike Peraza and Donald Towns shared art direction duties and helped establish the look of the film through color styling and background. Renowned children's book author/illustrator Chris Van Allsburg (*The Polar Express*) influenced the color schemes with his watercolors of Mediterranean castles and seascapes. Cartoonist Rowland B. Wilson and veteran Disney layout man Ken O'Connor suggested additional artistic approaches.

Also helpful during this period were some evocative pastel drawings by sketch artist Kay Nielson that were unearthed in the studio archive. Nielson, who had previously worked on the "Night on Bald Mountain" sequences for *Fantasia* and was a prominent illustrator of his day, had created storyboard art in the '40s for two proposed features from Hans Christian Andersen's work.

Mark Dindal was in charge of about 25 effects animators, who handcrafted hundreds of thousands of bubbles, not to mention reflective light patterns, distortions and other effects to establish the marine universe of the merpeople. "I started by going back to *Pinocchio* with its climactic water sequences," Dindal states, "and the Walrus and the Carpenter sequence in *Alice in Wonderland* and some moments in *Sword in the Stone*. Not only did I screen those sequences repeatedly to try to get some sense of what and how much was done, but I was able to pull many of the original drawings and the exposure sheets from those films which we keep filed in the animation morgue."

Some of the underwater effects in *Pinocchio* were drybrushed directly onto the cels, few of which exist today. "Unfortunately, some of the information that I wanted most was from *Pinocchio*, but the exposure sheets were very vague and hard to understand. They just didn't write things down as carefully then as they did in the later films."

One of the biggest challenges for the *Mermaid* effects team was the sea storm, in which the Prince's ship

Art director Donald Towns used a schematic chart of small color squares representing scenes to chart highly theatrical use of color in *Mermaid*.

Animator Matthew O'Callaghan worked on three diverse characters: the Shark, Prince Eric and Chef Louis. You may never eat fish again as you watch the mad chef chop off heads and yank out bones.

[illegible] a task to ink all those bubbles, but it really made a big difference. The Xerox toner tends to be a bit grainy, but the ink line is smooth and we can control the color. It really helps."

The character animation was [illegible] using a soft grey toner through most of the film. There are some situations which required a [illegible] as well, but there is quite a lot of hand inking in *The Little Mermaid*, specifically Ariel's fishy tail, and a great deal of colored inking on the sea witch Ursula.

All in all, John Musker and Ron Clements supervised about twice as many people as had worked on *Great Mouse Detective* or *Oliver* and they completed this film in half the time that would have been spent in the past on a project of this complexity. That's truly Disney's magic.

*The Little Mermaid*, based on the famous story by Hans Christian Andersen, is the first time in three decades that the Disney artists have turned to a traditional fairy tale for an animated [illegible] story about four or five years ago, [illegible] the animation department to begin submitting ideas for future projects. Clements was attracted by the idea

in addition to the use of various shades of Xerox toner throughout the film, a number of characters and effects required extensive hand inking. The Disney paint lab even invented a new color specifically called Ariel for the blue-green color of her fin.

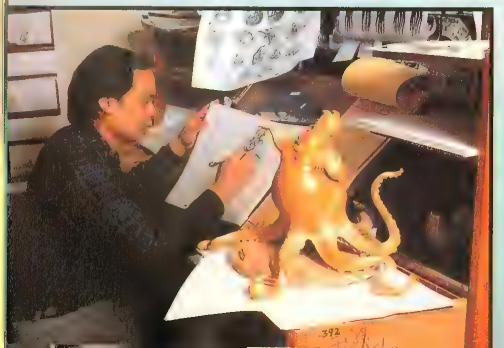
of an underwater fantasy; it hadn't been done before, and visually, he felt that the Andersen story had a strong cinematic quality.

As Andersen wrote it, though, *The Little Mermaid* is also one of the saddest of all fantasy tales, but Clements' two-page treatment was given the green light for further development. Teaming once again with John Musker, with whom he had worked so successfully on adapting Eve Titus' *Basil of Baker Street* for *The Great Mouse Detective* (which they discussed in STARLOG #108), Clements and Musker labored to produce a 20-page treatment. "We wanted to reconceive the story to avoid an ending in which everybody dies," says Clements, "but we wanted to do it without arbitrarily tacking on a happy ending."

In their version, the unnamed sea witch from Andersen's tale became more of a villain and figured more prominently in the overall story. New characters like Sebastian the crab, Flounder, Ariel's fishy friend, and Scuttle the seagull were added. Personalities for Triton, her father, and Prince Eric began taking shape.

As the development progressed, Howard Ashman, who wrote the book and lyrics for *Little Shop of Horrors* (which he directed Off-Broadway), was independently approached about contributing to a Disney project. Being a lifelong Andersen fan, he jumped at the chance to work on *The Little Mermaid*. In summer 1988, Clements and Musker went to New York to meet with Ashman and his partner, Alan Menken. The songwriters offered their opinions on the role and placement of music in the film and played an early rendition of

Inky, slinky Ursula is voiced by Pat Carroll, who envisions the character as part Shakespearean actress, with all the requi[illegible]xcalibr and [illegible]ar saleswoman.

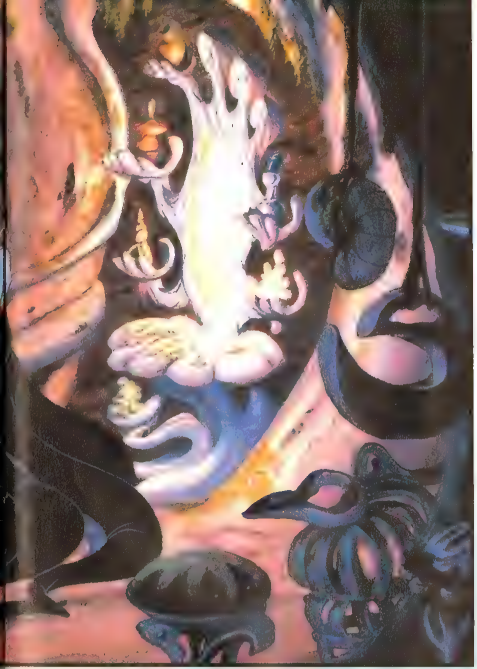


the "Under Da Sea" number. As the script was finalized, they became an important part of its creation.

The songs are so closely woven into the story that at times the film takes on the style of an underwater Broadway musical. Just as in the days of *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* when the studio staff musicians worked hand in glove with the animators, so too did Ashman and Menken work with Clements and Musker to insure that the songs either advanced the story or made revelations about the characters.

Their tunes also influenced the film's setting. "Ashman wanted to know if we were going to stay with

Born and raised in Okinawa, Ruben Aquino supervised a staff of four animators assigned to Ursula.



in any Disney film in a long time."

As fans who have seen the film currently in theaters may know, Ariel is a beautiful mermaid princess who is not content with her underwater life and dreams of living on land with humans. Her father, Triton the sea king, has forbidden the merpeople to have anything to do with humans, but Ariel amuses herself with a secret treasure trove of human artifacts that she has collected from various wrecked ships. One evening during a terrible storm, she rescues a handsome young prince who has been washed overboard. When Eric awakens on the shore, he can only remember Ariel's beautiful voice.

Defying her father's orders, Ariel makes a fateful pact with the sea witch Ursula, who agrees to make her human for three days. If Ariel fails to receive a kiss of true love from Eric in that time, she must return to the sea and become Ursula's slave. As payment, Ursula demands Ariel's voice.

Ariel is cast ashore, ragged and mute, but human, when Eric finds her. Obsessed with finding the mysterious stranger who rescued him from drowning, Eric is disappointed to learn that Ariel is mute. She can't be the one, he thinks. Still, he's drawn to her despite himself.

Just when it looks as though love might bloom between them, Ursula appears as a siren in disguise, and with Ariel's voice, Ursula attracts the Prince to her side. Eric seems powerless to choose between what he feels for Ariel and his fascination with that voice's beauty. If Ursula succeeds, she will have two slaves: the Prince blinded by evil cloaked in beauty and Ariel who has sacrificed everything for a dream.

*(continued on page 60)*

**the traditional Copenhagen setting for the story," explains Musker. "We had decided to avoid the usual Disney northern European Gothic setting for fairy tales and to create our own fantasy setting. Ashman wanted to do a Calypso-style song for the crab. So, Sebastian took on a distinctly Jamaican flavor. And then, there is the vaguely Mediterranean feeling for the Prince's castle, a 17th century sailing ship and so on."**

**Songs were laid out very early in the storyboarding process, and in most places, animation and editing had been done right to the music. "Howard and Alan brought a theatrical approach and style to the project that we tried to wed with animation and film techniques," says Musker. "I think the marriage is a good one. The songs are better integrated here than**

# ABLE TO SOAR HIGH

By DAN SCAPPEROTTI

It's Superman! Kirk Alyn!

Photo: Richard Todd

## *As both Superman and Blackhawk, Kirk Alyn winged his way through serial adventure.*

Once, long ago, he was the Man of Steel, the very picture of a superhero. But that time has past. Those were brief moments in his career as a hero.

It was during the late '40s and early 1950s that Kirk Alyn garnered a fame which escaped most actors who labored in the B units of the Hollywood studios. When the actor won the role of Superman, it seemed like a plum assignment that would lead to better recognition. Fame came but unfortunately, this sword had a double edge, and one that cut.

Between 1930 and 1943, Alyn had been busy treading the boards of New York's legitimate stage, appearing in night club and theater revues. And when the war broke out, the young actor was classified 1A by Uncle Sam's draft board.

At the time, he was working at the Versailles Club until 4 a.m. because that was the legal deadline for serving drinks. By 8 a.m, Alyn had to be at an NBC studio for his role in the popular radio soap opera *Portia Faces Life*.

Feeling the military draft breathing down his neck, Alyn decided it was time for a change. "I was very tired," he remembers. "I had lost a lot of weight working at the Versailles and doing the radio show for six months. I was getting weak and didn't want to go into the service tired. I asked to be replaced on *Portia* and went to California."

He had decided to just lay in the sun at Santa Monica for a couple of months while reviewing his options. Arriving in California, Alyn checked into a hotel and called Red Skelton. "Red was a buddy of mine from New York before anyone knew Red Skelton. He had a house in the San Fernando Valley. He asked me where I was staying and when I told him, he told me I was coming out and staying with him. And he wouldn't take any arguments. He drove out and picked me up."

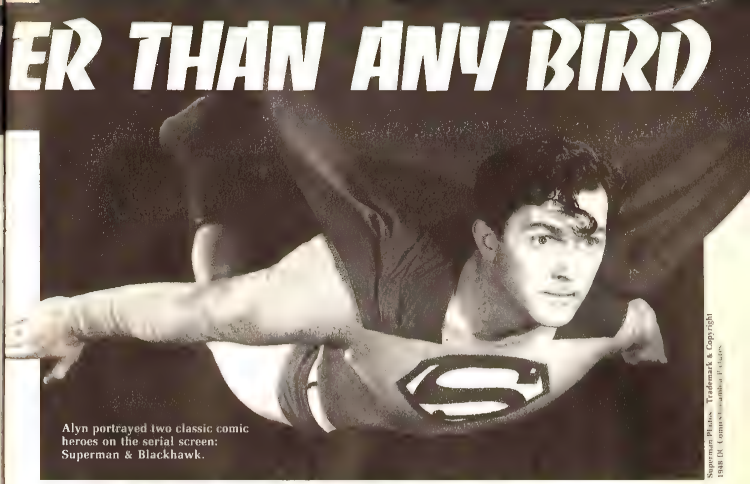
Although Alyn had once held a brief job at the Paramount Theater in Los Angeles, he had never had a real chance to see Hollywood. Skelton loaned him a car and Alyn drove into Hollywood. "It was beautiful then, a lovely town," Alyn remembers. "Nine o'clock at night, you could shoot a gun down Hollywood Boulevard and there wouldn't be anyone on the street. Now, it's Halloween every night, all night long. I was walking down the street and coming toward me was a tall, good-looking blonde who looked familiar. She recognized me, and I realized that she was one of the girls who had been in the last show I had done with Imogene Coca. We started talking and she said that she wanted me to meet her uncle."

As it turned out, the uncle was the producer and director of a show scheduled to open in San Francisco. "He kept looking at me," recalls Alyn, "Finally, he says, 'He'll be perfect for the part.' Now, I had come out here for a rest, but as soon as he offered me a job, I took it."

The show ran for 10 weeks and then Alyn returned to Hollywood where a friend introduced him to his agent. The first of several studios the agent approached with his new client was Republic Pictures. At 7 p.m. the same evening, a studio representative called the actor.

"They asked me if I was a quick study. I said yes, and if it's not more than 50 sides [i.e. different speeches], I'll know it by tomorrow.' As a leading man in a stock company, I had to

# ER THAN ANY BIRD



Alyn portrayed two classic comic heroes on the serial screen: Superman & Blackhawk.

Superman-Photos Trademark & Copyright 1948 DC Comics, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

learn a whole damned show in two days. He told me, there would only be two sides. The actor scheduled for the role had come down with appendicitis and had been rushed to the hospital. Could I be ready at 5 a.m.?"

Early the next day, Alyn found himself on the set of his first feature, *Overland Mail Robbery* with "Wild Bill" Elliott and George "Gabby" Hayes. Alyn played Tom Hartley, a young man from Boston thrust into a battle with a gang of stage robbers. With Wild Bill's help, he overcomes his fears and becomes a man.

"I was the guy who marries the girl at the end. Every time someone got shot, I fainted. I was supposed to be scared as I came into town riding on the top of a stagecoach. The fact is I *really* was scared. Bill Elliott was great and always wanted to do something for me. Gabby Hayes, who was also from the stage, was very helpful. They had a lot of fun with me on that picture."

Although he was listed 1A in the draft, Alyn was finding it hard to enlist since the services ranks were temporarily filled. He accompanied his then-wife, comedienne/singer Virginia O'Brien, to Catalina Island where she was doing a show. There, he happened to see a familiar face in a uniform—the gateman from Republic Studios who was now in the Navy. The pair chatted and Alyn asked if he could get into that Naval unit. The gateman was sure he could and the next day Alyn was called down for a physical.

Superman, Blackhawk Characters Trademark & Copyright 1948, 1950, 1952, 1981 DC Comics, Inc.

"Everything was all right although I had to have a gold tooth taken out. I waited just a couple of days and I went in the service. I was sent over to the Island, and although boot camp was usually four weeks, I spent eight weeks in an advanced unit."

O'Brien was under contract to MGM at the time and Louis B. Mayer gave a party to which his contract staff was invited. "Thankfully, it was after I was allowed to put on my blues. Up until then, I could only wear my boot camp outfit. Although I had on the blues, I had no insignia or stripes of any kind. Bobby Stack, with a drink in his hand, came over to me and said, 'Hi, sailor. How come no stripes?' I'm stuttering and I don't know what to say when suddenly it dawns on me that there is a blackout when ships come in and no one is allowed to wear anything that will give away what ships are in the harbor. Stack looks at me and says, 'Oh, you must be on one of those islands in the Pacific.' What a break!"

Following the war, Alyn found himself again at the gates of Republic Studios. In the first of his six serials, the 12-chapter *Daughter of Don Q* directed by Spencer Gordon Bennet, Alyn starred as Cliff Roberts with Adrian Booth as the title character Dolores Quantaro. Alyn encored with *Federal Agents vs. Underworld Inc.* in

Blackhawk Poster: Copyright 1952 Columbia Pictures/Courtesy Dan Scapperotti

**As usual, Alyn went to the source for his portrayal of Blackhawk.**

1949 and *Radar Patrol vs. Spy King* a year later, both directed by Fred C. Brannon.

"Freddy Brannon was a prop man at Republic," explains Alyn, "and they made a director out of him, but he didn't know much about directing. On the other hand, Spencer Bennet was an old pro who had directed Pearl White, the star of several silent serials. Spence was a fine director who knew serials backwards and forwards better than anybody.

"*Daughter of Don Q* was the best of the three at Republic," claims Alyn. "As far as acting goes, I was basically a detective in all of them."

He fondly remembers one incident in *Don Q* where he turned the tables on a heckling Adrian Booth. Cliff and Dolores are hot in pursuit of the bad guys as they drive off in a canvas-covered truck. The high-speed chase roars along a mountain highway. Rounding a bend, one heavy releases the canvas which flies back and covers Cliff's car. The vehicle careens out of control and plunges over a cliff towards certain doom in a lake below.

"Now, I know from the script that we have to swim out of that lake at some point," Alyn says. "I kept wondering when we were going to shoot that scene. I asked the director, Spence Bennet, if we were going to shoot it at a lake, and he told me that we would film it on the backlot pool and that we had to wait until they heated the pool. I kept thinking that there was no way they could heat up that pool. Well, it was the last day of shooting and Bennet takes us to the backlot. He explains that we have to dive into the pool and stay under as long as we can so all the surface ripples go away and we can come up in a smooth surface.

"Mind you that this is January or February and the water is *cold*. The time comes for the shot and they have dressing rooms warmed up for Adrian and I with a bottle of brandy and a person in each to rub us down after the scene. I get very suspicious, thinking that if the water is warm, what's all this for? I asked one of the stage hands to get a hose and wet me down before I got into the water. Adrian looks over at me and says, 'Ha, ha, ha. Look at the sissy getting wet down before he goes in the water. I'm just going to dive in!'

"I was all wet to take the edge off the cold plunge. We dove into the water and I stayed down as long as I possibly could and when I came up, I heard the darndest language and words I ever heard coming out of a woman. She was swearing like *mad*! That water was like ice. She came over and apologized to me. The director told Adrian that we would have to do another take because there may be lip readers in the audience and they'll know what she was saying. So, we had to shoot it again."

In 1948, Kirk Alyn won the role of Superman in the serial produced by Sam Katzman and its sequel *Atom Man vs. Superman* (both of which he discussed at great length in STARLOG #20). The assignment led to a meeting with the character's creators. "I know Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster very well," Alyn notes. "I still call them once in a while. Jerry Siegel had a heart attack last year. He was very bad and he still doesn't see people because he's very weak. I met them when I did the first Superman serial. I went to Forry Ackerman's house and met them there. Forry had me give a talk to his friends one night about Superman. Jerry sent me a nice letter thanking me for the talk and said how much he enjoyed it."

As a career move, *Superman* was a disaster for the actor. He was typecast by producers and film work dried up. Following the second serial, Alyn was having lunch with producer Sam Katzman. "I told him I had to go back to New York because he had ruined my career and I *couldn't* get another job in Hollywood because I did this damned *Superman*. Katzman asked, 'Who won't hire you? You can work in the *next* picture I do.' I thought, 'Yeah, you say that now, but wait until the next picture comes up.' I waited a couple of months and he called and asked if I still wanted to be in the picture, and it's *Blackhawk*," Alyn laughs.

When he first appeared in the August 1941 issue of *Military Comics*, Blackhawk was a creation for wartime America, battling the Nazis and later the Communists during the Korean War. A seven-man team eventually evolved, a group that would leap into their sleek planes at a moment's notice to battle malefactors wherever they found them: the leader Blackhawk himself, Hendrickson, an anti-Nazi German weapons expert,

Superman vs. Atom Man Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1956 DC Comics/Courtesy Dan Scapperotti

Chuck the American communications man, Andre the Frenchman, the Swede Olaf, the Pole Stanislaus and Chop-Chop the Chinese cook whose only weapon was a meat cleaver.

*Blackhawk* was the last comic book Columbia adapted for the serial screen. The plot involved the machinations of the Mysterious Leader of a gang of spies and enemy saboteurs. His chief henchman is Laska, played by Carol Forman who had been the evil Spider Lady in *Superman* and Alyn's nemesis Nila in *Federal Agents vs. Underworld Inc.*

"I didn't know from *Blackhawk* so I asked, 'What's that?' Katzman says it's a comic book! So, I ran out and got the comic books real quick and read them. I went down and signed the contracts. I got the comics to see what this guy looked like. The costume we used was a very light wool and it looked very nice. It was blue in the comics but our costumes were brown with the yellow insignia because it filmed better in black and white.

"Blackhawk was originally a volunteer flyer before America got into World War II," Alyn explains. "We were sent to England where we met the guys from Hungary, Yugoslavia and France. After the war, we came back to fight crime in America. We decided to call ourselves the Blackhawks after me. I was George Blackhawk."

Alyn points with pride to the fact that Blackhawk and his men avoided guns, depending instead on their fists to subdue enemy racketeers. He is totally underwhelmed by the he-men of today's screens. "*Heroes*?" he exclaims. "Sylvester Stallone? All he does is take off his shirt, they oil him up a little bit, he gets a machine gun and shoots everybody. This *isn't* a hero. These are bad guys killing people. Look at *Blackhawk*. They *never* used guns. They had people come at them with guns and they got

**The actor soon became frustrated by the typecasting that came with Superman.**

Superman ™ & © Time Mirror Photo. Courtesy Nostalgia Ventures, Carlsbad, California

Blackhawk Photos© Copyright 1952 Columbia Pictures

After Clark (Alyn) and Lois (Noel Neill) finished their confrontations with Lex Luthor (Lyle Talbot), hero and villain would trade cabbage recipes.

***Superman* serial producer Sam Katzman offered Alyn an escape from the bonds of the Man of Steel: *Blackhawk*.**

out of it. They beat the hell out of the bad guys, but they didn't kill anybody."

For his interpretation of the role, Alyn went right to the comics. "How we interacted with each other I took from the comic books. When they gave me the script, they were surprised that I knew about the character and his motivation. However, Sam Katzman wasn't surprised because he knew that I had used the comic books for reference on Superman."

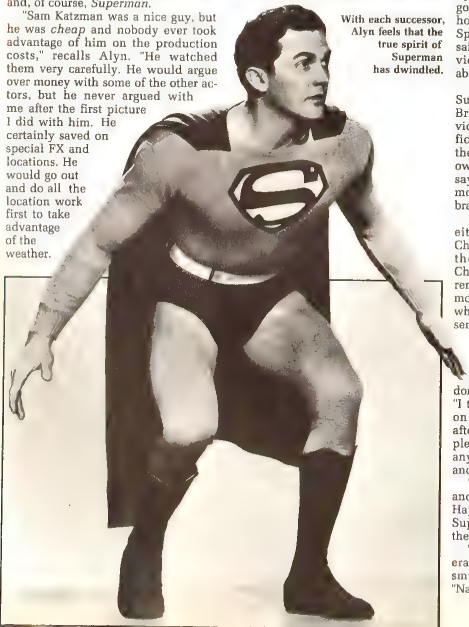
Katzman was the king of low-budget films. He could crank out a feature based on a major news story and have it in theaters before it was off the front page. Katzman took over the serial unit at Columbia Pictures in 1945, producing all of that studio's serials until the form's demise in 1956. Like Universal in the 1930s, Katzman tapped comic books and comic strips for many of his serials. Included in the Katzman canon are *Batman*, *Brenda Starr*, *Hop Harrigan*, *The Vigilante*, *Brick Bradford*, *Congo Bill* and, of course, *Superman*.

"Sam Katzman was a nice guy, but he was *cheap* and nobody ever took advantage of him on the production costs," recalls Alyn. "He watched them very carefully. He would argue over money with some of the other actors, but he never argued with me after the first picture I did with him. He certainly saved on special FX and locations. He would go out and do all the location work first to take advantage of the weather.

"I never used a telephone booth in *Superman* because Sam thought it would cost too much to have it moved around," Alyn explains wryly. "So, I would land behind something and come out dressed as Clark Kent or I would duck into the store room at the *Daily Planet* and come out as Superman. Sam watched *pennies*."

The animated scenes in the two Superman serials have been the subject of much fan criticism. The Man of Steel doesn't fly in these movies as a *live-action* character; rather, he transforms into a cartoon, flies, then reverts to Alyn. Not only were the flying scenes done via animation, but the bullets bouncing off the Man of Steel's chest and other superfeats were also created by an artist's pen. Alyn feels that Katzman "could have done a better job on the animation. That's where he was *really* chintzy. It turned out pretty good, but he could have made it look more like me and he could have gotten Superman in closer."

The actor remembers his Lois Lane, Noel Neill, as nice to work with although she was quiet. "She would forget her lines once in a while and the director would scream because the old man [Katzman] was watching any retakes."



**With each successor, Alyn feels that the true spirit of Superman has dwindled.**

Alyn recalls an incident on the cave set of *Atom Man vs. Superman* where he, as Superman, confronts Lex Luthor, played by Lyle Talbot. "Lyle Talbot was a fine actor with a great sense of humor. He and I were doing a scene where he was going to shoot me and threatening to send me into the Empty Doom. We're arguing back and forth and the director calls cut while they adjusted the lights. During the break, I'm telling Lyle how to make stuffed cabbage. They start the cameras rolling again, but there is still a shadow on my face. So again, Spence calls a break. Lyle and I pick up our conversation. The director sees us talking every time the cameras stop and comes over to see what we're talking about. I said, 'Well, Spence, I'm a good cook and Lyle is a good cook and I'm just showing him how to make stuffed cabbage.' Well, Spence just threw up his hands and said, 'Here I have a superhero and a vicious villain and you're talking about making stuffed cabbage!' "

As part of the celebration of Superman's 50th anniversary, Warner Bros. released the two serials on videotape, the first time they were officially shown to the public since their initial release. "They used my own films to put the serials on tape," says Alyn. "I don't have them anymore because I sold them, but I had brand spanking new prints."

Alyn doesn't have a preference for either the late George Reeves or Christopher Reeve's interpretation of the character. "I know that Christopher Reeve is a fine actor," remarks Alyn, "but I don't think the movies' writers had any conception of what Superman was. They did a lot of sensational things. They updated him. I think each picture is worse than the one before, and now the guy [Reeve] can't get a job."

He doesn't feel that television has done justice to the Man of Steel either. "I turned down the role of Superman on TV twice," Alyn reveals. "Once after the series was on the air a couple of years. They didn't want to pay any money, the stories were so bad and the direction wasn't very good.

"I saw the new *Superboy* TV show and it was *very* bad because he [John Haymes-Newton] had no idea who Superboy was. Now I understand that they've improved them."

What does Kirk Alyn think in general of today's movie heroes? He smiles. "There *aren't* any," he says. "Name one."

# ABLE TO BEND

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# IN HIS BARE HANDS

*play*

*It was a bird. It was a ~~plane~~. It was a Man of Steel on Broadway.*

By LYNNE STEPHENS

In the last decade or so, comics heroes have been serious business. *Superman* exploded onto the silver screen in 1978, releasing the character from a B-flick kiddie-oriented milieu into high-flying box office history through an earnest, lavish approach completely devoid of coy elements. Although filmgoers debate the merits of some of the *Superman* sequels, that first film directed by Richard Donner (see page 53), set a standard of sincerity against which most sober comics entertainments such as *Batman* are judged.

Had *Superman* screenwriters Robert Benton and David Newman somehow time-warped their movie hit and its appreciative audience to the 1960s, the history of their first Superman effort, the Broadway musical *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman* might have had a happier ending. In 1966, *Batman* was bat-a-rang-ing into American homes twice a week on TV, and "it was free and a big hit, says Lee Adams, lyricist for the *Superman* musical. "People thought it was the same thing in the theater. It wasn't that at all. It was very straight.

In 1964, Adams, a two-time Tony award winner for his work on the musicals *Bye, Bye, Birdie* and *Applause*, and his songwriting partner Charles Strouse had just completed the musical *Golden Boy*. 'After that opened, Strouse and I wanted something that was lighter. We had both been fans for years of Newman and Benton, who worked on *Esquire*," recalls Adams in the study of his New York apartment.

'So, we met Newman and Benton and we asked them—and they were very funny guys—if they had ever thought of writing a musical comedy. They said no.' Adams and Strouse then asked the pair to come up with a project. "They came back to us with the idea of doing Superman, and we thought that sounded pretty good. We then went to the people who owned Superman, got the rights to do a musical, and we wrote it. That's easy to say, but it took us a year-and-a-half. Then, we looked for a producer.'

Undaunted by the odds against succeeding with a musical based on a comic book (*Li'l Abner* was years in the past, *Annie* in the future), Harold Prince entered the project as producer and director, molding for the stage Newman and Benton's core ideas. The musical wove together two sub-plots: One dealt with Lois Lane's unrequited love for Superman, the other concerned a mad scientist's schemes to destroy Metropolis and the Man of Steel, aided by unscrupulous columnist Max Mencken of *The Daily Planet*.

Superman TV Production Photo - ABC

**Years after Broadway, ABC broadcast a production of the musical done especially for TV featuring this Man of Steel.**

Despite a superficial professional resemblance to Perry White, archlouse Mencken was not even loosely based on *The Daily Planet*'s blustery editor. The characters in the musical "were all made up except for Superman and Lois Lane," says Adams."We wanted an original story.'

Original story or not, the production team still had to find a Superman that would adhere to the public's long-held image of the Man of Steel. Because of the physical and musical requirements for the role, 'Hal Prince said that it was going to be very tough to find our lead character," Adams remembers. Shirley Rich, the casting director, began searching for an actor who could match Prince's exacting specifications: 190 lbs., 17' neck, 50" chest, 32' waist, 37 1/2" hips, 18 1/2" biceps and 26 1/2" thighs. "So, we started auditions, and the first guy to walk in was a guy named Bob Holiday," says Adams. "He was 6' 4", handsome, black hair, good singer, dumb, which didn't necessarily help, but he was a perfect Superman. We kept auditioning, saying, you know, he was too good to be true. And finally, we came back to the first guy who walked onto that stage."

Pausing for a moment, Adams corrects himself. "He wasn't dumb, he had a sense of humor. I take that back. He was sort of a methodical kind of actor, but it worked for Superman. He was terrific, wonderful. After the show, he would stay in his cape and sign autographs for kids backstage."

Comparing the *Superman* films' Christopher Reeve to Bob Holiday, Adams thinks Reeve "does that nebbish thing so well as Clark Kent. It is *not* easy to do." Holiday "tried to play it like Reeve does. He wore the glasses, and he tried to be Clark Kentish, but he couldn't quite do it as well as Reeve. Still, he was a terrific Superman, and in his cape, he was just great."

Superman's nemesis, villainous 10-time Nobel Prize loser Dr. Abner Sedgwick, offered abundant comedic possibilities to actor Michael O'Sullivan as well as lyricist Adams. The character "was a take-off on the mad scientist thing. [O'Sullivan] was such a kooky actor. He had red hair that was like a hat, and a funny, off beat face,' says Adams. "All of his movements were sort of erratic.'

Adams Photo: Courtesy Lee Adams

**Lee Adams provided the lyrics for *It's A Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman.***

Sedgwick's signature song, "Revenge,' 'was a very good number, if I do say so myself," laughs Adams. In "Revenge." Sedgwick disparagingly lists all the achievements of the scientists who, for so many years, have robbed him of Nobel Prize glory. "I liked the whole song a lot. 'My heavy

**David Newman co-wrote the musical with partner Robert Benton. Later, the pair and Newman's writer wife Leslie would tackle the *Superman* films.**

## Man of Steel on Broadway

*It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's Superman* was co-written by David Newman and Robert Benton. Both would later go on to work on the screenplay for *Superman the Movie*. David Newman would eventually team up with wife Leslie to polish the first film's initial script and pen two subsequent sequels (STARLOG #73).

"Robert Benton and I were freelancing magazine articles," explains David Newman "and Lee Adams and Charles

Superman Stage Photos - Courtesy Milburn Smith

**The late Jack Cassidy was Max Mencken, the "comedy lead." His secretary, played by Linda (*Alice*) Lavin, sang the show's hit song, "You've Got Possibilities."**

water was heavier than his,' was one of the funniest lines I've ever written."

Max Mencken, who allies with Sedgwick to destroy Superman, was "based on Walter Winchell, who was a gossip columnist and awful man," Adams reveals. "He was a gossip guy, but he was also very powerful politically. He was ultra-right-wing, and he destroyed some careers." To underscore his point, Adams adds, "He was *not* a nice man." Laughing, the lyricist continues, "Of course, we didn't play him like that, we played him for comedy." Because Winchell had been a hoofer before his aggravated assault on journalism, musical star Jack Cassidy delivered his songs with a "sort of clumsy dance, as if he were great," recalls Adams. "You could see it in his acting. *He* thought he was great, although he was clumsy and very, very funny."

Behind the scenes, though, Cassidy was no laughing matter. During rehearsals, Cassidy would approach Prince and the others with scenes that he had rewritten to favor his character. "He was a bit of a prima donna, but he was so good," says Adams. "And, yes, he was a pain in the ass, to use a technical term."

Although Cassidy's name figured above Holiday's on the marquee, Cassidy's Mencken never really overshadowed Holiday's Superman because the roles were so different. Cassidy was a comedy lead, and Superman was very, very straight. That's what made it funny, but there was no camp in the show," says Adams.

*Superman's* out-of-town tryout took place in Philadelphia in 1966. The show received unenthusiastic notices. Tinkering with the musical's elements, the production team removed Joan Hotchkiss as Lois Lane and replaced her with Patricia Marand. Adams doesn't recall specifically why Hotchkiss was replaced, although he notes, "Some people audition great and then somehow, when you get in to work, they don't come up to what you need. Maybe she just didn't hit it off with the other actors, maybe the balance was wrong."

*(continued on page 52)*

"Superman" Stage Photos — Lisa Wyckham — © DC Comics Inc.

Photo: John Claxton

Strouse, the composers who had written *Bye Bye Birdie* and many other great shows, went to lunch with us. They suggested we write a musical. That didn't happen, but we had a wonderful time. Our son Nathan was eight years old at the time and he was reading comic books. Leslie came out of his room and said, 'You know what would make a great musical?' And she held up a Superman comic book. I thought, 'Wow, what a great idea!' Benton liked it, and then Adams and Strouse liked it, so we wrote *Superman*.

"It was a wonderful show," Newman enthuses, "which took a year to get on, as Broadway shows do. We were in trouble in Philadelphia, we got it whipped into shape, opened in New York in March 1966 and got the greatest reviews you ever saw in your life. We thought we had a smash hit. . . . There was a line at the Alvin Theatre, now the Neil Simon Theatre, which went around the block, and we thought, 'Here it comes, guys. Get me that house in San Jose.' "

Everyone was shocked to learn that the show was anything but super at the box office.

"We had our own theories as to what happened," recalls Newman. "Benton called it 'Capelash,' as opposed to backlash. The *Batman* TV show had come out at the same time. *Superman* was a musical, it was fun, but it wasn't campy. We took the character very seriously, but *Batman*. . . just because it was a time of pop art, a great deal of magazine coverage had *Batman*, *Superman* and Andy Warhol's 'Campbell Soup' all grouped together as if it was all part of the same phenomenon. I think people said, 'Why should I pay 12 bucks a ticket when I can watch *Batman* for nothing?' The other thing, despite the reviews, is that people kept coming up to the box office and saying, 'I want 15 tickets for my son's birthday party on a Saturday matinee.' "

Leslie Newman suggests that few theatergoers wanted evening tickets because they thought it was a children's show. In actuality, *Superman* had a very sophisticated kind of humor in which the attempt to destroy the hero was through psychoanalysis. In the Newmans' favorite scene in the play,

During out-of-town tryouts, Patricia Marand came aboard as a new Lois Lane.

which they call the "brainwashing sequence," the villain begins asking Superman if he dresses up as he does because he "needs" to be noticed.

"But this was hardly stuff for five-year-olds," Leslie Newman points out. "People just had this notion that *Superman* was for kids. It really *was* ahead of its time."

"We were selling out matinees and going empty at night," David Newman interjects. "They changed the advertising and used sexy girls, but nothing worked. After three months, one day in July, the show just closed and that was the end of that, and I forgot all about superheroes. Many years later, Alexander and Ilya Salkind came to us to script the movie, with no idea that I had done this musical. I began to think that there was something in fate that this red-caped creature would fly into my life every 10 years and save my ass."

—*Edward Gross*

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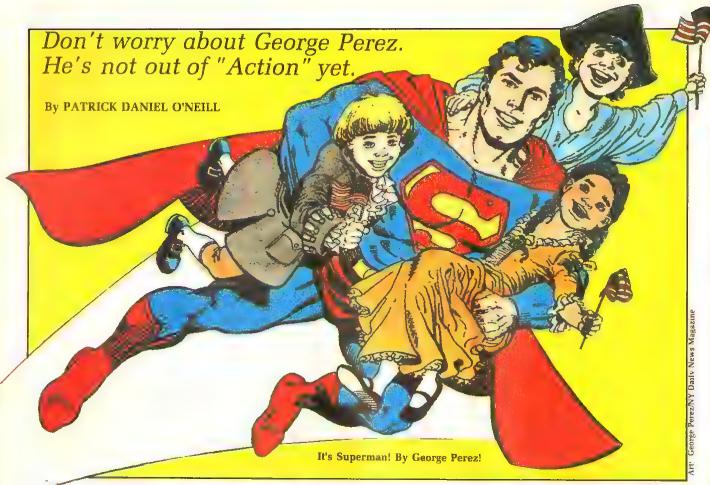
*Don't worry about George Perez. He's not out of "Action" yet.*

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL



It's Superman! By George Perez!

Art: George Perez/NY Daily News Magazine

# ABLE TO LEAP PANEL BORDERS IN A SINGLE BOUND

I wanted to be involved with Superman because he was one of the *first* characters I became enchanted with as a child," says George Perez of his work on the Man of Steel. "There were bits of the Superman mythos I wanted to touch on, particularly the Kryptonian heritage."

Perez signed on to the Superman team after the sudden departure of John Byrne (CS #5), who had done a celebrated revamp of the character following DC's *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, the maxi-series that "simplified" DC's universe. Perez, now famed for his similar reworking of *Wonder Woman*, had some misgivings about Byrne's changes, though he liked one part of it. "Out of all the things that John Byrne did when he revamped the character, the one I thought was most thought-out was his version of Krypton," Perez continues. "It shows his love of science fiction. Many people may have disagreed with his vision, but it was his. It made Krypton totally different from Earth, although no longer a utopia. It was well thought-out, while I felt many of John's other changes were haphazard, just change for change's sake, without real reasons.

"The problem with Krypton, unlike Paradise Island in *Wonder Woman*, is that Superman can't go back there," Perez points out. "All the stuff John set up was subtext—we couldn't use it anymore because the planet was destroyed. But by creating the Eradicator [a Kryptonian device discovered by Superman during his recent exile in space], we could refer back to Krypton in current storylines and deal with Superman as an alien from another planet. Although he was raised on Earth, he *is* the last son of Krypton. There's *no way* there will ever be another pure Kryptonian. There isn't another Kryptonian alive for him to mate with."

As for those things that Byrne dismissed and Perez disagrees with, Perez has recently had a part in

restoring one of them: the Fortress of Solitude. "I thought abandoning the Fortress of Solitude took away some of Superman's uniqueness," Perez notes. "I didn't think that change was necessary. The re-creation of any character is a task of getting rid of what is universally considered wrong with the character. With Wonder Woman, there was a lot of stuff wrong with the character. But with Superman, most of the stuff had become so engrained to readers as part and parcel of the myth, that I didn't envy John the job of altering him. Almost any changes he made would have been frowned upon by some people, but I think he went a little too overboard on some of the changes, as though he was thinking, 'This ought to disrupt a few people....'"

Perez's response was to return to the Man of Steel's roots. "When I did my first issue of *Action*—the only one I actually scripted—I went for all the clichés: 'Great Caesar's Ghost!', 'Don't call me chief!', 'It's a bird, it's a plane...', 'truth, justice and the American way,' the whole lot. I had to use 'faster than a speeding *rocket*' because there were no bullets in the story."

Yet after making those contributions, Perez now finds himself backing away from Superman, a move he was forced to make, in part, by time constraints. "I am no longer part of the Superman team in any plotting sense," Perez reports. "I'm doing thumbnail layouts, with more rendering on key figures, on *Action Comics*. Basically, I'm responsible for the pacing and the layout. Kerry Gammill then blows them up to full-size for Brett Breeding. By the time Brett gets them, two artists have already done work on them. He's in charge of completing the pencilling and inking.

"Kerry was an additional step. Originally, I was doing very loose layouts in full size, but it was taking me more time than I really wanted," Perez admits. "I was getting less and less involved in the Superman books, but this way I'm still involved. Dan Jurgens' plots in *Adventures of Superman* are still spinning off ideas I came up with for the origin of the new Fortress of Solitude. When the Fortress is completed in issue #461, I'm inking that issue. The readers get the fulfillment of the promise of a Perez Fortress of Solitude, because Dan is designing it and I'm putting in the finishing touches."

As well as time, other factors led Perez to relinquish his share of the reins on the titles.

"I'm stepping back, in part because I didn't want my ego to supplant the importance of Superman," he notes.

THAT AIN'T NO HURRICANE, JESSE!
IT'S
SUPERMAN
AND I, FOR ONE AM GLAD TO SEE HIM!
YEAH! AND FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE'S BEEN THE BANDAGE WHAT'S HELD THIS TOWN TOGETHER THE LAST COUPLA DAYS OR SO!
BUT EVEN HE CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE!
All Superman & Wonder Woman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics, Inc. Art: Dan Jurgens/George Perez

**Unable to control Superman's fate alone, Perez thought it would be best if he backed off from the Man of Steel's adventures.**

"No discredit to the other creators on the Superman books, especially Jerry Ordway (CS#3) and Roger Stern, but I had trouble with not having the autonomy I do on *Wonder Woman*. The editorial policy with Superman is that the three books are closely tied in a timeline: *Action* to *Adventures* to *Superman*. As I worked out the Fortress of Solitude story, I wanted to have Superman sequestered for a number of issues, thus putting all the other writers in the position of *not* being able to use him. I thought they

Art: Chris Marrinan/Steve Montano

UH-OH.
WHAT IS IT?
HOW ABOUT WE FLY SOMEPLACE A BIT MORE PRIVATE.
YOU LOOK UNCOMFORTABLE, AND I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING.

**Unsatisfied with how Superman and Wonder Woman's romance turned out, Perez has tried to rework the relationship.**

Art: Tom Grummett/Bob McLeod/Thanhhuel Lavante; George Perez

All New Titans characters & art: Trademarks & Copyright 1988 DC Comics, Inc.

**With "A Lonely Place of Dying," Perez has contributed to the mythos of each of DC's Big Three.**

could do their stories, simply saying they took place before or after mine, but the editor, Mike Carlin, wanted to keep it linear. That made the compromises a little rough for me. I thought I could handle it better than I did.

"I didn't want to put Mike in the uncomfortable position of choosing among Jerry, Roger or me," says Perez." I didn't want to push my weight around or the others to push theirs. I realized, 'If I'm the only one having trouble with the timeline, let me be the one who backs off.' "

The artist says he stayed on doing the layouts out of regard for Brett Breeding, who came on *Action* as a finishing penciller and inker and got a special rate for it. "It would have been unfair if my decision had lost him those benefits," Perez says. "Visually, the book will look the same: what will be missing is my plot contributions, although it will still have my pacing contribution. I have occasionally restructured elements of Roger's plots for pacing. The Perez touch is *still* there a bit."

Perez had spent about six months working out plotlines for DC's oldest continuing hero. Many other writers have called it a daunting task due to the character's familiarity. Perez says he was lucky to follow Byrne's Superman revisions.

"It wouldn't have been as easy before the revamp, with all that history," Perez admits. "But here, in the case of Krypton, I found something that had not been fully explored. The fact that Krypton's established history was so fragmented allowed me a twist I wouldn't have had otherwise.

"In the case of Superman—or almost any superhero—the thing I find interesting is not the main character, but how others are affected by him and how he feels about them. The supporting cast becomes much more important. Then, when Superman has been through his umpteenth battle, you can move away from Superman and concentrate on Jimmy, Maggie or Lois. Plus, you have the advantage now of throwing a few twists in, as we did with the Jimmy Olsen/Elastic Lad re-creation, since the legend is no longer etched in stone."

One of Perez's contributions got somewhat altered along the way. He says he wanted to bring back Superman's recognition throughout the universe. "There were two schools of thought on that," Perez points out, launching into the story behind the return of Superman's indestructible cape. "My original concept was for him to get the indestructible cape on Earth from a company that makes costumes for many other heroes, and then discover it's owned by LexCorp. But since I had already drawn him coming back to Earth with a full cape and Jerry Ordway had done the gladiator sequence with a shredded cape, Superman had to get it while in space. So, my second idea was that Superman would be given a cape as a reward for defeating Mongul, thus giving him something that would be recognized on other planets. But then, they had the Eradicator create the whole costume, cape and all. Those were the kinds of compromises with which I began to feel uncomfortable. There were so many people involved and all of us were on different deadlines."

With the recently completed *Batman/New Titans* crossover story, "A Lonely Place of Dying," Perez has now had a hand in telling the adventures of each of DC's three major world-reknowned characters: Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. Was handling this triumvirate a conscious desire?

"Having done *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, I've done *everybody*—although not in their own titles. Consciously, I had a desire to handle the three lead characters in the DC universe, celebrating their 50th anniversaries in a row," Perez admits. "I plotted the *Batman* stories with Marv Wolfman because he asked me, since we were working together on the *Titans* end of the story anyway. I had to bridge the first and second *Batman* chapters, since they were completed—picking up all the clues that Marv left to the mystery. He congratulated me—I picked up all of them; of course, I had full knowledge of Marv's resolution."

And there was an ulterior motive for drawing the covers to both the *Batman/Titans* crossover and its predecessor *Batman: Year Three*—they'll make up a large chunk of a Batman portfolio due out next month.

Perez is now co-plotting *The New Titans*, plotting *Wonder Woman* and doing layouts for *Action Comics*. However, comics fandom hasn't seen the last of full Perez pencil art. He has a major work due out sometime in 1990: the long-awaited *Titans* graphic novel, *Games*.

Art: Dan Jurgens/George Perez

"I'm working on it right now. I'm trying to produce four pages a week so I'll be done by the end of January," Perez reports. "They're being inked by Karl Kesel and colored by John Stracuzzi. There's no firm release date. There have been so many that have come and gone that I want to play this a little closer to the vest. That's my fault, nobody else's. By producing on a four-pages-a-week schedule, I'm not forcing somebody else to do their part in a hurry. Karl's not going to get 120 pages to ink all at once: 'You have two weeks!' " he laughs.

Another *Titans* project is the oftenmentioned *Titans West* series. Perez says it's still planned. "One of the stories that Marv discussed was a mystery story in which the Titans are missing. That could lead to the introduction or reintroduction of the Titans West set of characters. Then, I would be the writer of the second *Titans* book if reader interest warrants a second title. It also depends on whether I have the time to write it, or if I would be better off on another title I could write and draw.

"I'm *not* interested in doing a monthly series anymore," Perez sighs. "I can't do one and do my best work. I used to be able to be satisfied with the work I did on a monthly basis. Now, I look at it and say, 'Ahh, it's not really the best I can do,' and I *don't want* people to think it's my best, either. I hope to do mini-series, maxi-series, graphic novels. I really enjoy inking other people. I just finished inking a Carmine Infantino story for *Secret Origins*, 'Space Museum.' I'm slated to be the regular inker on *Titans* over Tom Grummett. It's not all Perez anymore, but at least Perez has the last word, as every inker does. But, that means finding a penciller who doesn't mind my having the last word. I'm very faithful to pencillers, but I'm extravagant when it comes to extra detail I toss in."

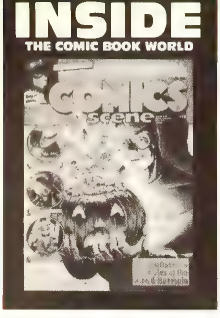
As for the kind of thing Perez would like to be doing, he notes, "The non-commercial stuff is always the stuff you *really* want to do. I want to do a romance story, people in regular clothing. I would love to do a comicbook adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* using all the tricks of the trade I know, not the stodgy old *Classics Illustrated* style. I can't talk to the folks at First [doing the new *Classics Illustrated*, see page 17] until my exclusive contract with DC expires next year. But by stating this in print here, they'll know I'm interested. I would like to do similar things with Edgar Allan Poe, though I would have to alter my style.

"And finally, something real science-fantasy oriented, where I don't have to worry about reference," he comments. "I could create the entire world and not have to worry, 'Does this look right?' It's lazy in that you don't need reference, but more work because you have to design everything and then be consistent."

In addition, George Perez has proposed a maxi-series to celebrate Wonder Woman's 50th anniversary. "It deals with the return and the exit of the gods, including a battle of the mythological deities. What if Poseidon went against Neptune?" he asks. "That could put Aquaman in a position to confront Wonder Woman. That way we could do something different from the usual big crossover series. It's my last year on Wonder Woman, and I would also pencil the series. That would be the big finish."

Art: Tom Grummett/Bob McLeod/Thumbnail Layouts: George Perez

**While he would like to shy away from monthly assignments, Perez still has some *Titans* duty to fulfill.**

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## Superman

*(continued from page 47)*

Prince also found it necessary to shorten the production by pruning some of Cassidy's scenes. The friction between Cassidy and the production team grew, adding to Cassidy's reputation as a difficult performer.

*Superman* opened in New York on March 29, 1966 and received mostly positive reviews, with critics singling out for praise the snappy tunes, witty lyrics and clever special effects. For Superman's airborne entrances and exits, "we got Foy, who did all the flying on stage. He does *Peter Pan* all over the world," says Adams. "He has a patented wire device that he uses." In recent years, Foy has designed flying systems that permit performers to swing out over the audience's heads, but in 1966, his repertoire of SFX was more modest, and Superman did little more than ascend to and descend from the wings. Also, Foy and the production team made no attempt to hide the wires from the audience, but to many critics, this bare bit of business simply augmented the musical's unaffected charm.

Other memorable elements included a stage set of rows of rectangular boxes designed to resemble a page from a comic book, an acrobatic dance number in which Superman subdues hoodlums, and a "live" documentary film addressing Superman's origins. One song, a flirtatious number delivered by Mencken's secretary Sydney to a flustered Clark Kent, crossed over onto the popular music charts. Peggy Lee eventually recorded "You've Got Possibilities" as a single. The actress playing Sydney the secretary, Linda Lavin, would go on to become a household name as TV's *Alice*.

Despite the critics' affection, a substantial Broadway audience never materialized. After discovering that the show was perceived as children's entertainment, Prince lowered ticket prices and introduced extra matinees. The matinees sold out, but the evening performances continued to play to near-empty houses. Shows derived from comics, reasoned the public, wouldn't appeal to adults, and the campy success of *Batman* reinforced the stereotype of comics-based shows as mindless, low-brow diversions unworthy of a trek to Broadway. *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman* closed after 129 performances.

Questioned about the possibility of a Broadway revival, Adams quips, "I would accept it. Possibly because of the movies, it might be hard to get a revival because we've been saturated in Superman for the past few years." However, schools and amateur groups around the country have regularly performed *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman* since its Broadway demise. In 1988, the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts Theaterfest in California staged a "brisk and breezy revival," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Concurring with the original production team's intent, the *Los Angeles Times* reported: "...notwithstanding the fact that PCPA director Jack Shouse regards *Superman* as his 'family' show, it's a treatment of the Superman story that adults will probably enjoy more than children." Most revivals' budgets don't permit the Man of Steel to attempt aerial action, but the PCPA Theaterfest, says Adams, "got Foy out there, and they did it."

Although Adams feels *Superman* was "a very good show" that suffered bad luck on Broadway, he speaks of his two years' participation in the project without bitterness. Asked if successfully producing a musical with comic-book origins is harder or easier than producing other types of musicals, Adams replies, "I have no idea. It's how well you do it, and just the luck of the draw," he shrugs. "Nothing is as hard to do as a new musical. A straight play will have, maybe, 20 light cues; a musical has 250. Scenery is complicated. Everything has to work together. When you start adding in music, you have tremendous complications.

"Every hit musical is a fluke," Adams adds. "A fluke of the right combination of creators, writers, directors, actors and designers. The whole thing [has to jell] together, which means that everybody is doing the same show. That's really so tricky because of all the egos and different talents involved. It's all such a crap game."

Had the TV *Batman* not been around in 1966, or had the public generally understood that *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman* contained affectionate adult satire rather than kiddie camp, the musical might have been dealt a better hand.

So many things have changed in 23 years. Films, comics and Broadway have been cross-pollinated by other media and have increasingly welcomed new, more mature interpretations of old childhood favorites. comic-book heroes being no exception. Were a Superman musical to open on Broadway this year, many more people than in 1966 would probably be singing to the Man of Steel, along with Sydney the secretary, baby, "you've got possibilities."

*Only something deadlier than Kryptonite could have kept Richard Donner from finishing his epic sequel.*

It's Superman! Christopher Reeve!

# ABLE TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF MIGHTY MOVIES

**By EDWARD GROSS**

"You never realize how big and impossible a job it is to tackle a picture, because if you did, you would probably *never* do it," proclaims director Richard Donner. "I knew I had a major picture with major problems, but you surround yourself with very talented people, you have an approach and you're going to correlate all of those suggestions and thoughts—hopefully—into some sense of objectivity, and you go out and make it."

The "impossible" picture in question is 1978's Ilya and Alexander Salkind-produced *Superman*, the motion picture that introduced modern audiences to the legend of the Man of Steel and, combined with *The Omen*, put Donner on the Hollywood map, establishing him as one of the hottest directors around. That streak has continued, with such box office hits as *The Goonies*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Scrooged* and *Lethal Weapon 2*. Donner was also supposed to have directed 1981's *Superman II*, and in fact did helm about a third of that film, but difficulties with the producers led to his dismissal and replacement by director Richard Lester.

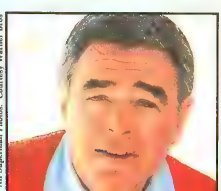
"My original [*Superman*] contract was to deliver *two* films," Donner explains, "so therefore everybody who signed was told that they were doing two films. We started both and shot everything with Marlon Brando, Gene Hackman, Ned Beatty and Valerie Perrine for both pictures, and then we realized that if we were going to deliver the first one by Christmas, we had to stop and put all our efforts into that. Having completed everything with those actors, we put *Superman II* on the side and put all our efforts into the first film. *Superman* was a success, and the Salkinds, for whatever reason, chose not to bring me back. After I waited to hear for six or eight weeks, I got a telegram that said, 'Your services are no longer needed.'

"Things got so bad between the producers and I," Donner continues in a voice laced with disappointment, not bitterness, "that they wanted an arbiter, and they suggested [director] Dick Lester. I knew Dick, so it was just wonderful. The deal stipulated that he wasn't allowed to attend dailies or be on the set unless he was invited, and he turned out to be a charming, delightful guy, and we had a great time together. Anything the Salkinds had to say to me, they would go through him and the same thing back from me. That was his function on the film, and we became good friends. But, that turned into him taking over *Superman II* without picking up a phone and calling me."

All Superman Photos: Courtesy Warner Bros

All Superman Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1978 DC Comics, Inc.

**Before Richard Donner came on the project, Marlon Brando had been signed but Krypton had been doomed to a retro-30s look.**



Donner/Lady Hawke Photo: Copyright 1985 Warner Bros & 20th Century Fox

**"All the good parts [of *Superman II*] are mine," says director Richard Donner.**

What went so terribly wrong between Donner and the producers that this situation ever arose?

"God knows," he sighs. "We had the task of making that film out of my office. I had *a* secretary, *an* assistant and a wonderful editor. Things were a mess throughout the making of the entire film. Every time we wanted to do something, their production department would cancel it, bills weren't paid, people wouldn't deliver products and we had to hustle, rob, beg, borrow and steal. *Superman* is a tribute to many dedicated filmmakers, I'll tell you that. But, that's show biz!"

In a sense, it was that predilection towards "show biz" on the Salkinds' part that may have led to Donner's involvement.

"As was their custom, whoever was hot was who they used," offers the director. "*The Omen* had just come out and I got a call one morning and some guy said, 'This is Alexander Salkind.' I said, 'Yes...' 'You don't know who I am?' 'No.' 'Have you ever been to Cannes [film festival]?' 'No.' I thought it was someone trying to sell me a story or something. He said, 'I'm a film producer.' I said, 'Oh, really?' Who was this guy? So, he said, 'Did you see *The Three* and *Four Musketeers*?' I said, 'Yes,' and remembered what had happened on that.

"They made one picture called *The Three Musketeers*," Donner explains, "but they shot enough footage to make *The Four Musketeers*, and they didn't want to pay the actors for the second picture. Now, there's a requirement I believe called 'The Salkind Clause' that says you *must* declare how many pictures you're doing when you're shooting. Anyway, he said, 'We're doing *Superman* and we want you to do it. We'll pay you a lot of money.' 'Terrific, I like a lot of money, but I don't know anything about the film.' He said he would send me a script."

Literally 30 minutes later, a messenger delivered a lighthearted 500-page screenplay written by Richard and Leslie Newman and Robert Benton based on Mario Puzo's more humorous story treatment which encompassed the stories of both *Superman* films.

"It just didn't work for me," he admits. "So, I said I didn't want to do it. They called back and insisted, and suggested they fly me out to Europe to talk to them.

"My agent and I flew over on the agreement that if I did the film, I could bring in a new writer. They resisted that idea, but ultimately agreed to it. I wanted to use Tom Mankiewicz [who discussed the film in STARLOG #69]. He has been a friend for 20 years, but we had never worked together. He's tops, so I agreed. Tom came on to the picture and we were off."

Donner pauses for a moment, gathering his thoughts concerning those early days of the project. "The picture had been prepared for a year in Rome," he says. "When I came on, we had to throw out the entire preparation, because we couldn't use it. It was originally going to be directed by an Englishman [Guy Hamilton] and produced by two Russian-Frenchmen [the Salkinds], and yet they were doing a classic American fable *without* an American eye looking at it. When I agreed, I decided that I really wanted to...not altruistically, but I was concerned that *Superman* shouldn't get screwed up. So, I said, 'Yes, I'll do it.' I never realized the challenge I was taking on.

"When I arrived at Shepperton Studios and saw the preparation, I asked them to show me the flying material. I watched it and was stunned to see a man walking along who's jerked off the ground by two wires, and then landing out of control. That was the first thing we had to correct. Then, we had to cast the role, and they wanted to use Robert Redford or something. I said, 'Redford is *not* Superman.' They had all these other names, including Muhammed Ali! We had lots of problems like that."

Casting would have been a nightmare, Donner notes, if Christopher Reeve hadn't entered the picture.

"We had seen just about every actor imaginable from television to motion pictures and everything else," he details. "Nobody fit the costume. Nobody could wear the 'S' and be believable. Nobody could fly. If you saw Bob Redford flying, it would be Bob Redford flying.

"I met Christopher Reeve [CS#1] in New York. I had gotten a call from someone who said, 'There's a kid who's terrific. Would you like to see him?' He was about 20 or 30 pounds lighter, his hair was a sandy color and he had dressed in the burliest clothes he could find to make him look good. I gave him my glasses to wear, and he looked so much like the part it was unbelievable. Nobody wanted to go with Chris because he was an unknown, but the idea to me was that we *should* go with an unknown so that you could make it believable. It ended up just that."

As pleased as Donner was that the role of Superman had finally been cast, he was equally as happy with the casting of Marlon Brando as Superman's father, Jor-El, and Gene Hackman as arch-villain Lex Luthor, both of whom had been signed *prior* to Donner's joining the film.

"The interesting thing is that the Salkinds had tried to sell this project in Cannes for a couple of years, and every year there was a helicopter with a banner that said, 'The Salkinds Bring You Superman'," he says. "But, they had a tough time convincing the powers that be to give them the money, because no one was sure if they were going to deliver. Quite intelligently, they went to Mario Puzo and paid him a lot of money to write the story. So, they had Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*, now set to write *Superman*. Then, they went to Brando and Hackman, offered them a lot of money and gave them specific dates they would shoot, although they didn't know when, where or how. They ran a sign over Cannes that said, 'The Salkinds Bring You *Superman*...Written by Mario Puzo... Starring Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman.' Overnight, they were accepted, so when I came on the picture, these two guys were going to do it. I was thrilled, because neither part could have been played better by anybody. We were also married to the dates that were promised to Brando and Hackman, and that was an awesome responsibility.

"Once I signed, I replaced just about everyone who had been on it because we had a different attitude about how the picture should be made. It was like 11 weeks later, or even less, that we were shooting on Krypton with Brando. Unbelievable."

Donner's intention was to bring a purist point-of-view to the film, keying in to the original *Superman* mythos, and avoiding the treatment given to the legend via the 1950s TV series.

"I knew the *Superman* legend and grew up on it," he enthuses. "I knew I *didn't* want to do what television had done to it. Every kid remembers the TV show. This film was in its pure form, but on a grand scale, and as we got into it, I saw it as three separate films. It was a trilogy in our eyes.

"One was Krypton," he elaborates, "where we broke away from tradition, because when I came on to the project, their preparation for Krypton was exactly the way it looked in 1939 and I knew that was wrong. A very woodrous man, John Barry, who had done *Star Wars* and died shortly after making this film, came up with a 'modern' Krypton, which we felt was crystalline, like the inside of a stone. Then came the second part of the trilogy, which was Smallville. We didn't research the comic book all that much, but we did spend a lot of time in Norman Rockwell. We just wanted to make Smallville Kansas-Americana. When we got to Metropolis, we went back to the comic book.

"You really don't realize how impossible things are, but you just blindly blunder ahead, hoping that the Great God of Cinema is going to lead you to it."

Superman Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

**Donner had different ideas on how Superman (Reeves) and Lois (Margot Kidder) would finally get together.**

Judging by *Superman*'s critical and commercial success, Donner did indeed find that path, which makes the fact that he didn't finish shooting the sequel even more curious.

"Let me put it this way," he says, "all the good parts [of *Superman II*] are mine. Everything with Hackman, Brando—well, they cut Brando out because he wanted more money—Beatty and Perrine was shot by me. It was going to be more in the tradition of the first one. The villains were going to be much more believable. I hated the stuff they did with the villains in the small town. It looked like an Englishman's point-of-view of what America would look like, with the Army, the jeeps, the people...there

*(continued on page 66)*

Photo: ©Daily News

**One of Lois Lane's attempts to prove that Clark is Superman was shot by Donner, but not used in the Richard Lester sequel.**

# PIRATE ON THE HIGH STARS

*Captain Harlock has new territory to plunder—the comics page.*

By DREW BITTNER

Captain Harlock has good reason to be bitter. He lost not only an eye, a love and a spaceship to a conquering race of aliens. Harlock nearly lost an entire world as well: the planet Earth.

But he's not bitter. He just wants the aliens off his planet—*forever.*

Meet the legendary hero of a cult favorite Japanese manga, who, with his band of hi-tech freebooters, has been brought to America by Eternity Comics with their new black-and-white series, *Space Pirate Captain Harlock*, written by Robert Gibson with art by Ben Dunn.

"Harlock is nothing if not different," Gibson says. "Our jumping-off point is *My Youth in Arcadia* [an animated feature] which is the 'definitive' origin of Captain Harlock."

Captain Harlock is the 30th century descendant of an ancient line of pirates and mercenaries whose only credo is following their own hearts, no matter what the cost. This Harlock is no exception, having dedicated himself in his origin story to the protection (and eventually, liberation) of Earth from an alien armada.

"The Illumidas conquered Earth and Harlock fought in Earth's defense," Gibson explains. "His ship, the *Deathshadow*, brought refugees back to Earth from some of the colonies which had been conquered. The Illumidas took his ship away from him and told him he would spend the rest of his life wandering around on Earth, which is decimated and looks pretty ugly. He comes back to see his lover Maya [who is subsequently killed by the Illumidas] and meets Tochiro Oyama, a descendant of a man his ancestor was very well acquainted with—it's metaphysical; it was kismet they met at this time.

"Tochiro built a spaceship without the Illumidas knowing about it," the writer reveals. "Harlock and Tochiro escape from Earth and spend the rest of the time fighting the Illumidas, as much as you can when you're a lone ship fighting an empire."

When the comic series begins, Gibson says, Harlock and Tochiro have been fighting the Illumidas for two years. They've returned to Earth to rescue a comrade captured by the aliens, but Harlock has an ulterior motive for visiting his homeworld.

"He's coming to Earth to gauge the current spirits of Earth's people and

find out whether they would aid him in a revolt," Gibson says. "Unfortunately, he finds that that's not the case because they've been pretty decimated. They haven't advanced in spirit enough to be able to rise up."

Harlock also visits an old friend, who is killed by the Illumidas during his visit. The friend's son, a teenager named Tadashi, is taken to safety by Harlock, but he eventually joins the space pirate's crew.

"Tadashi is a reader surrogate," Gibson says, excited at discussing one of his favorite characters. 'He gets to ask all the questions the reader would want to know. Most of the things we learn about Harlock, we learn with Tadashi. Harlock will have a parent-son relationship with him."

The teenager will have more than just one parent, however. Tochiro Oyama will remain a major character, his life having been intertwined with Harlock's since the distant past; Gibson says the Harlocks and Tochiros have been together since World War II. "We know they've been together that long," he says. "Maybe even longer..."

Sharing their adventures is Emeraldus, a former free trader scarred for life by an Illumidas commander who now lives for revenge. Eventually, she becomes Tochiro's lover in the manga.

"Harlock, Tochiro Oyama and Emeraldus are three *very* central characters," Gibson says. "They've appeared in every incarnation [of the Harlock mythos]—manga, TV and movies."

Also aboard the pirate vessel is La Mime, an alien cyborg who has no mouth; she talks with a blinking light that produces sound for her. Originally a minor presence on the Harlock TV series, Gibson has made her a prominent bridge member.

Their foremost opponent is Muda, an Illumidas commander who will devote his life to making Harlock's difficult. But while the heroes' enemy is the Illumidas, Dunn and Gibson's approach avoids the cliches of evil aliens from outer space.

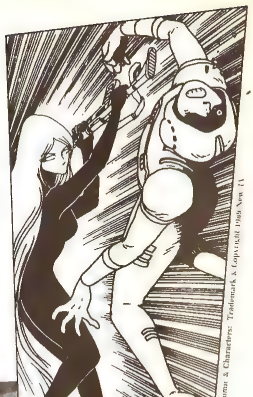
"It's very important to realize that the Illumidas are *not* the 'bad guys,' they're not villains," Dunn says firmly. "They're just there to do what they're supposed to do. They treat Harlock as a rebel, one who won't conform to the system that they have. Some of them are [villainous], but it doesn't mean the whole race is bad. There are Earth people who are nastier than the Illumidas could ever be."

"Leiji Matsumoto [Harlock's creator] wrote some of this from his own experiences in post-World War II occupied Japan," Gibson says. "I would like to think we Americans were a little nicer than the Illumidas, but part of the story was taken from his life."

After spending their first few issues on Earth, getting organized and introduced to the readers, the story will take off for outer space. Although the Illumidas will be confronted often, Gibson warns readers not to expect any easy victories or final resolutions for Harlock.

"He's really only one man fighting against an army; he can do a lot, but he can't really do that much. I don't see the Illumidas being overthrown in the foreseeable future," Gibson muses. "There *is* a lot of hope—that's really the idea of the series. Harlock realizes he has to inspire the people of Earth to win their own war, instead of trying to win it for them."

Although action will play an important part in *Harlock*, the meat of the series will be interpersonal relationships and moral questions



Captain Harlock's name & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1985 Nelvana Ltd.

Gibson has strengthened the part of Harlock's cyborg ally, La Mime.

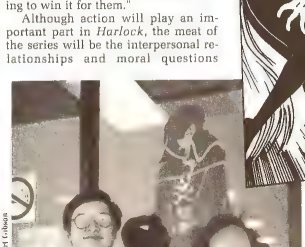
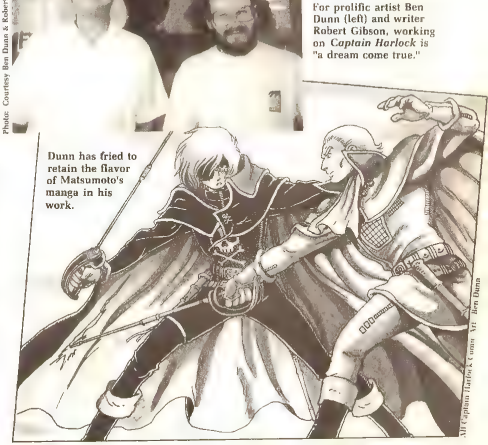


Photo: Courtesy Ben Dunn & Robert Gibson

For prolific artist Ben Dunn (left) and writer Robert Gibson, working on *Captain Harlock* is "a dream come true."

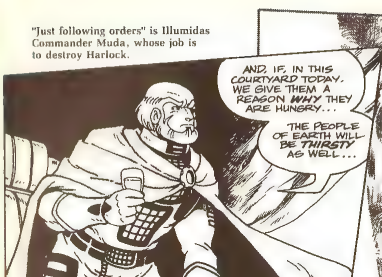


All Captain Harlock visuals: Art: Ben Dunn

Dunn has tried to retain the flavor of Matsumoto's manga in his work.

Harlock Animated Art: Copyright 1985 Harmony Gold/Tatsunoko

"Just following orders" is Illumidas Commander Muda, whose job is to destroy Harlock.




raised by the characters and their conflicts. This is why Gibson considers Tadashi the most important character in the series.

"Matsumoto often has an older and more knowledgeable person teaching a younger, less experienced one," Gibson says. In *Harlock*, he relates, Tadashi is the one whose growth and discovery of life's lessons is the series' real foundation.

"He won't just stay on the ship," Gibson explains. "Whenever there's a point to be made about the way things are, or the way things maybe should be, he'll be there. Between running around fighting people, the series will really chronicle his growing process."

Harlock first appeared as a character sketch by young Leiji Matsumoto, who became an influential manga artist in the mid-1970s. Matsumoto created *Galaxy Express 999* and did several girls' manga and World War II series, but there was no place for Harlock in either situation (though the pirate later appeared in both *Galaxy Express* theatrical films). Harlock *almost* became a crew member of *Space Cruiser Yamato* (known in America as *Star Blazers*) when Matsumoto did some character sketches for that manga series. However, Matsumoto ultimately chose not to use Harlock there.

The galactic privateer finally received his own book, which started in the early 1970s, and had a TV series that lasted for 42 episodes. Harlock also guest-starred in several of the manga Matsumoto created, including *Galaxy Express*.

"If someone wants a history of Harlock, I basically ask them how much time they have," Gibson laughs, claiming that giving a concise, complete history of Harlock, is nearly impossible.

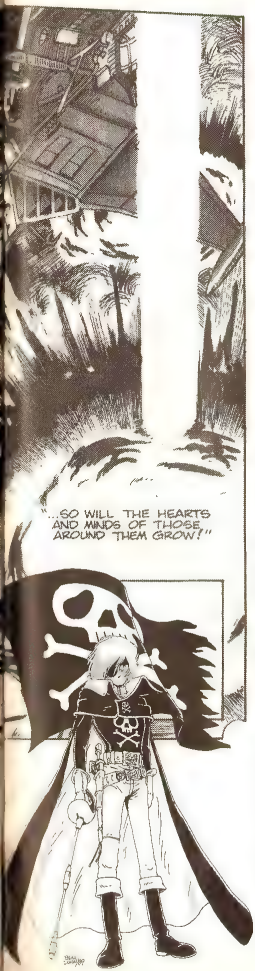
Art, Background Pencils, Pat Duke Additional Inks: Alan Neponuremo

"There are *so many* incarnations wandering around," Gibson says, "and they really are separate characters. One Harlock was running around during World War II, for instance." Citing a familiar example, Gibson continues, "It's very much like *Dr. Who*, because you've got a bunch of different people who've done [the manga], who've added their own interpretation to it. And sometimes, it doesn't make much sense."

Also, Dunn notes, that Matsumoto wasn't very rigorous about making his Harlock stories fit together. "Continuity is real important to Americans," the artist says, "but it wasn't to Matsumoto. He figured everyone knows who these characters are so he didn't always draw them the same way; there were subtle differences, sometimes depending on the emotion of the story he was doing."

With this in mind, Gibson says they do not intend to try and fit their new stories into what has already been published.

"There's almost no way to 'squeeze' stories into the Harlock mythos because there are so many different




**Captain Harlock's adventures are supposed to have been derived from Matsumoto's own experiences in post-World War II occupied Japan.**

Harlocks," Gibson explains. "Basically, we're just taking off from *My Youth in Arcadia* and doing all original stories from there, stories that are as faithful to the source material as we can be."

"We're handling it with kid gloves," Dunn says happily.

The two say bringing Harlock to American comics readers was a labor of love. Both are longtime Harlock fans and were ecstatic over having the chance to do one of their favorite characters.

"This is like a dream come true," says Dunn. "We're surprised a Harlock comic didn't appear sooner. I'm lucky to have this opportunity.

"The one thing that appealed to me about Captain Harlock was that he represented many American values. Lately, the heroes in comics are *not* heroes, they're violent anti-heroes. Harlock is an anti-hero, true, but there's a reason for it, and he counteracts his violence with acts of tenderness, mercy and compassion as well."

According to Dunn, there's one surprising influence in Harlock's creation. "Matsumoto was a big fan of Westerns, and if you look at it that way, Harlock could be seen as much a cowboy as a pirate," Dunn says. "You know, you got the good guys riding into town and fighting the bad guys, then riding out again."

Dunn, whose credits include the manga-styled *Tiger X* and *Ninja High School* as well as two *Popeye* specials, notes he had to approach *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* from a fresh perspective as an artist.

"I've noticed they [American comics artists] don't seem to end up being very faithful to the source material, especially when it comes to American adaptations of Japanese material," comments Dunn. "I'm not a Matsumoto and didn't set out to be. I could have taken a bunch of the more popular images of Harlock and done it in my style—you know, forget about the source material. It was hard for me to change my style, but I was so familiar with 'Matsumoto-isms' and some of the visual effects he uses in his comics, I decided to go ahead and draw it in a style I thought fit the story's intent while at the same time keeping the original's flavor. The first issue looks a little rough, but we've gotten a sense of the characters."

**There is no single interpretation of Harlock, so Gibson and Dunn are picking up the pieces soon after the animated film *My Youth in Arcadia*.**

MY NAME IS LA MIME. HURRY AND TAKE THIS NOTE AND THESE FOOD COUPONS TO YOUR FATHER.
?!
THANK YOU!
Comic Art Courtesy Eternity Comics

**"Tadashi is a reader surrogate," explains Gibson. "He gets to ask all the questions the reader would want to know."**

And as enthusiastic as Dunn is over the art chores, Gibson is equally happy about writing the book.

"It's going to be written with an overly melodramatic feel—lots of metaphors, similes, analogies. I love stuff like that," Gibson says.

*Harlock* is Gibson's first comic project, having been a fan of Japanese animation and even a journalist of the comics field for some time. He claims his major influences as a writer are not comics, but rather the classics, from William Shakespeare to Mark Twain.

"I'm not really influenced by comics that much, except some Japanese manga, some of Matsumoto's things," he admits. "It helps when you love the stuff. Most of the people who do adaptations don't seem to care about the material itself. It's like lots of writers learned to write by reading comics and so they don't really put in much that's new."

Within the next year, Gibson hopes to be able to adapt *My Youth in Arcadia* as a comic project as well. "Eternity doesn't have the rights to it yet, but maybe within a year, they will. It'll answer many questions the readers would want to know because that's our foundation," he says. Beyond that, although an Emeraldus mini-series is planned for next summer, even the privateer's own creative team is uncertain what direction Harlock's own adventures will head in.

"They will be wandering around a lot," Robert Gibson says. "I would like to make it a thoughtful book, but it depends on what the readers want."

"Our objective is to do as good a comic book as we possibly can," remarks Ben Dunn. "It's a wonderful series that we're doing."

## Mermaid

*(continued from page 39)*

As you can imagine in a story of this scale," says Musker, "there are some killer scenes with huge production numbers and dozens of animated characters in the same frame. One of the first things we put into production was the 'Under Da Sea' number. In some cases, we had to assign a lot of animators to the same scene. One animator would do these five guys on the left and another would do these 10 guys on the right and so on. It was the only way to get through a complicated scene without killing one poor animator.

"Other scenes required computer animation, such as when Ariel runs down the stairs in the Prince's castle, thinking she is going to hear the good news about her wedding to the Prince and instead hears the bad news that the Prince has found someone else. We did a computer-generated staircase so we could do a moving camera shot and track with Ariel as she runs down the stairs. This meant that all the backgrounds of the stairs and balustrade were painted cels. Each one of the cels took one person a whole day to paint. Normally, a cel can take anywhere from 10 minutes to half-an-hour, or maybe an hour at the outside. This was eight times harder than the most difficult scene just in terms of painting time. We managed to sneak that one through without too many people realizing quite how complicated a scene it was," smiles John Musker.

Cel painting and inking chores are coming to an end at Disney, though, with the introduction of the new Computer Assisted Post-Production System (CAPPS). In fact, there won't *be* any cels to ink or paint. Animators' drawings will be transferred directly to a computer terminal for coloring. Disney executives hope that the next feature *Rescuers Down Under* will be *entirely* computer-colored. As a test, the very last shot in *Mermaid* was done on CAPPS. Everyone at the studio seems excited with the possibilities. "The potential is enormous," agrees Ron Clements. "It's going to take some time to get the bugs worked out, but there are two great advantages. First, it's a money saver. Second, there is the potential for a tremendous increase in production values. We will be able to use more colored lines on characters, more shadows, more multiplane focus effects, texturing, transparency effects, whatever you can think of. The only limit around here is our imaginations."

## Pogo

*(continued from page 32)*

bring the art out. The *Pogo* work is just too busy a style to fit into that limited space. It seems to me this strip is touching nostalgia buttons, but I would rather see new work done, rather than revitalizing the old."

The reduction in size, and consequently the complexity of the artwork, is just one facet in what some feel is a trend toward magazine-style single panel gags, with few words and no story development potential.

Charles Schulz, creator of *Peanuts*, the most popular comic strip in the world, feels, "The two new artists are doing a beautiful job of duplicating Kelly's drawing style, the designing and background. I don't know what readers of strips are thinking these days. I feel that readers, or at least editors, are choosing strips with shorter panels and single one-a-day gags, so consequently, it's difficult for a strip like the new *Pogo*, which has a more literary outlook, to find a larger readership.

"I think a terrible trend is to have one large panel on the Sunday comics page, say like Gary Larson's *The Far Side*. So, if we artists have to be content with this size, then all we're going to have eventually is gag cartoons, like in the magazines."

However, there still seem to be those mavericks who refuse, as Schulz's own work reflects, to simplify, to create one-dimensional characters. "Something that is working in the new *Pogo*'s favor is the success of Bill Watterson's *Calvin & Hobbes*, which has a wonderful level of drawing in it—the drawing technique, the brushwork are very similar," Schulz contends.

Bill Blackbeard, noted for the *Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*, recognizes that Kelly possessed a combination of talents that is rare in any one person.

"There's an item that's hard to find among comic strips, what Al Capp called 'The Natural Born Comic Strip Artist,' who's terrific at stories, art, dialogue and everything. Then, there are others who have to split the talents of writing and art." Blackbeard reflects. "This strip is quite worthy—it's intelligent and witty, though it's certainly *not* the equal to Kelly. But these two young guys are working well as a team."

Chuck Jones (CS#2) has had the unique advantage of knowing both Walt Kelly and his artistic "heirs." Jones, creator of animated filmdom's Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner worked for about a year with Kelly on the *Pogo CBS Birthday Special* in the mid-1960s. Kelly was the voice of Albert the Alligator and Jones did Pup Dog and several others. He recently met Doyle and Sternecky, and feels they're making good the difficult job of carrying on in Kelly's tradition. "I think Walt would have approved, and certainly I do. One of them seems to have taken over for Kelly's brain and the other for Kelly's hand."

Steve Thompson is a freelance writer and the director of the last remaining official Pogo Fan Club. It is the only club that is authorized by the Kelly estate (and can be contacted at: 6908 Wentworth S., Ridgefield, MN 55423). The Club paper, the *Fort Mudge Most*, is a charter subscriber to the new *Pogo*. The letters to its March issue were almost exclusively concerned with *Walt Kelly's Pogo by Doyle & Sternecky*. Thompson reports that the response was positive.

"It's very close to the way Kelly was drawing it. I'm very impressed; it's certainly the best attempt to copy his style that I've ever seen. I see nothing wrong with another artist and or writer taking over a strip when the creator dies or retires. In some cases, it could be even better than the original. For example, *Gasoline Alley* is considered to be better now than in the original," Thompson asserts.

"The biggest problem, from what I've seen in letters to papers around here, is just that *Pogo* has not been around in the public eye for 15 years. I think if Doyle and Sternecky had been able to come in during October '73 when Kelly died, I don't think 99% of the readers would have even noticed, much less thought to complain. For the old fans, it's achieved Holy Grail status, so they remember it as different or better than it was."

It is the nature of nostalgia to intensify the colors in our memories, to amplify the feelings for that which has been lost or left behind. It is the magic of art to engage our empathy, filling pen and ink characters with reflections of ourselves so that they become as real to us as our friends and relations. It is the irony of human nature that we then place upon these characters expectations we could never demand of the living. No matter how fervent our wish that they never die or leave us, our loved ones cannot keep the same form forever, whether they are two-dimensional or three. But we can honor and celebrate them. Larry Doyle and Neal Sternecky's *Pogo* is both a sad reminder of our loss of Walt Kelly's rare talent and a sincere tribute to his genius. Walt Kelly summed it up best in a balloon: "Don't take life so serious. It ain't nohow permanent."

# A Dog's Afterlife

*"All Dogs Go to Heaven" may sound depressing, but Don Bluth believes he's barking up the right tree.*

**By IAN SPELLING**

Back in the fourth grade, Don Bluth's teacher read her impressionable students a book called *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. Little did she know Bluth would grow up to be a world-class animation director. He toiled first for the Disney Studios and, in 1979, broke away to form his own company, taking Gary Goldman, John Pomeroy and several other Disneyites with him.

Their first independent project, the television special *Banjo, The Woodpile Cat* led to *The Secret of NIMH* (see the original CS #3). By 1984, Bluth and company had teamed with businessman Morris Sullivan, whose financial backing enabled Bluth to pursue his dreams.

Bluth directed and Steven Spielberg executive produced the next feature, *An American Tail* (STARLOG #114) while George Lucas jumped on board for *The Land Before Time*, which marked the first time an *entire* Bluth feature was conceived and produced at the Sullivan Bluth Studios in Dublin, Ireland.

Yet through the years, that strange title, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, continued to haunt Bluth until it finally became his current project. "I didn't remember *anything* about the book, but I never forgot the title. I have since looked up the book and it is indeed something I would not remember," Bluth says by phone from Ireland. "*All Dogs Go to Heaven* is intriguing. I have had several dogs in my life, and as each one has passed on, I wondered, 'Where are they? Or are they anywhere?' I was very close to them. You know how you get close to your pets, and when they go, you're very affected by it.

"Just contemplating the fact that some people believe there is a Heaven or an afterlife and some people believe there isn't—and it is really anybody's guess—led me to think, 'What if there is? Would animals go there, too?' Then, I figured, 'It's going to make many people unhappy if I even suggest that animals go to Heaven if they are good, so let's do it!' If I'm going to Heaven and they want me happy there, then my dog Skipper *has* to be there with me.

"We sat down and imagined that all dogs go there, and we fantasized about one dog who wasn't really a candidate for Heaven, a rogue who doesn't like people, who would never help anybody, never curl up at your feet, never lick your hand, nothing. We thought about lovable rogues and the first name that came to mind was Burt Reynolds. He can play a stinker, but people still love him."

*All Dogs'* story concerns Charlie Barkin (voiced by Reynolds), a German Shepherd who escapes the pound and seeks to rejoin his casino partner, Carface (Vic Tayback). Carface has other ideas and sends Charlie to Dog Heaven. Clouds, music and the easy life bore Charlie, so he tricks his guardian angel and returns to Earth. A relieved Itchy (Dom DeLuise), Charlie's best friend, welcomes him back, and together, they plot revenge.

Charlie and Itchy uncover Carface's secret, a little girl named Anne-Marie (the late Judith Barsi), who possesses the power to confer with animals. Carface has been using her to elicit insider information about the outcome of his casino's rat races. When Charlie realizes the child's worth, he kidnaps her.

The orphaned Anne-Marie adores Charlie, and despite the growing feelings he has for her, Charlie uses the girl in much the same way Carface

**A formerly deceased dog, Charlie, finds love and life with little Anne-Marie.**

did. Time, however, is running out for Charlie. The watch that foretold "his time" is blinking ominously. In order for Charlie to re-enter the pearly gates, he must prove himself worthy. The rest of the movie provides Charlie with plenty of opportunities to do so.

Despite the history behind the film's title, the animator nearly changed it because a holiday release targeted for family audiences might be better served by a less depressing title. "Many people suggested changing it," Bluth recalls. "I thought, 'No, no, no, no.' *All Dogs Go to Heaven* is very provocative. When I would mention that title to people, they would grin. Whether or not you believe in Heaven or an afterlife, it's still just a little fairy tale, an allegory which says, 'If you're ever going to come of age, you have to earn it.'"

wife[ Loni Anderson grew up wanting to be an animator. When Burt told me that, I suggested she be one of our voices. So, she's Flo. She was terrific, such a lady.

"I had worked with Charles Nelson Reilly before. I just love the timbre in his voice. He brings such texture and character to any role he does. It is an animator's dream to listen to his voice. Dom is like family. Vic Tayback was new to me. To make him really feel at home, we put him and Charles Nelson in a room together and let them record their lines. That was magic.

"It is the *easy* way to go, to jump on someone's known personality. We try not to do that too much. We look for chemistry between our character and the voice personality. We say, 'Wait a minute, Burt Reynolds is this

A lengthy conversation about the future is preceded by an equally involved recollection of the past. *Banjo, The Woodpile Cat* came together in 1979, after Bluth and 11 other animators exited Disney. "That was the picture of our eager intent," says Bluth. "We were going to prove to the world that we were there. *NIMH* did not do as well as we had hoped. It's a nice little film and I'm still very much in love with it. There are places all over the world where people have not yet even *heard* of *NIMH*. Maybe someday they will. That would really please many of us here."

The Bluth outfit followed *NIMH* with the popular video games *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*. Then, they met Steven Spielberg. Animation at the time was in a decline. Few Hollywood execs felt it could be prof-

Burt Reynolds and Dom DeLuise, due to their friendship on and off screen, were a natural to be cast as the canine pair, Charlie and Itchy.

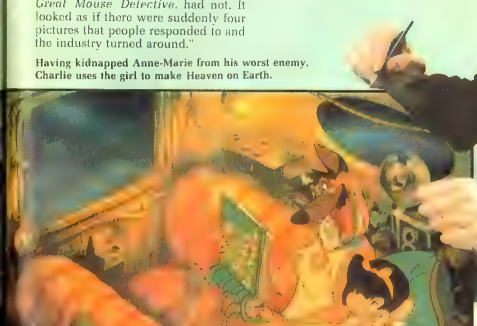
Dom DeLuise has become something of a Bluth regular, lending his voice to *NIMH*, *Tail* and now *All Dogs*. It's no secret that DeLuise and Reynolds are longtime friends, so Bluth capitalized on their relationship and tapped into their established chemistry. "We got the two of them together and said, 'We would like to write a dog picture and have you two play a couple of pal dogs who are up to no good.' They said, 'Give us the microphone and go away.' We did just that. [Reynolds' way. We have to make Charlie that way, too.' In some ways, it's identical to directing a live-action film. Animators have to know *everything* about how a character thinks inside. They don't just sit down and start moving a character around on paper. They have to sit there and compare notes so that all 12 or 15 animators who are working on the same character agree on how that character thinks. Whereas, for example, if Jack Lemmon were acting a part, it's between him and the director.

itable. But, he remembers, "Steven *believed* in animation. We were talking, and he said if not too much was spent making a film, then it could be a box office success. He figured *An American Tail* could make about $30 million, so he said, 'Let's spend $7 or $8 million, no more.' What we did, because the animation industry was in such trouble at the time, was freeze everyone's salary for a year-and-a-half, no benefits, nothing. Those people did this for *An American Tail*.

"We made the film for $9 million. It

went out there and not only did $30 million, but domestically did *$50 million*. It made $25 million foreign and it did another $75 million with the videocassettes. That's *$150 million*. It made a profit," Bluth laughs.

"It seems to me many things were born out of that success. *Roger Rabbit* [already in production] came along almost immediately. After *American Tail*," continues Bluth, "we started *Land Before Time*, which did better, actually, than *American Tail*. Then, Disney did *Oliver & Company* and that made money. Their two previous features, *Black Cauldron* and *The Great Mouse Detective*, had not. It looked as if there were suddenly four pictures that people responded to and the industry turned around."



**Having kidnapped Anne-Marie from his worst enemy, Charlie uses the girl to make Heaven on Earth.**

**"If I'm going to Heaven and they want me happy there, then my dog Skipper *has* to be there with me," declares Don Bluth.**

NMH Photo Copyright 1982 MGM/UA

Bluth describes his years working with Spielberg and Lucas as "delightful." However, there is nothing quite like being in charge oneself. "I thoroughly enjoyed working with those two men. They are both very gifted and we're still good friends. I loved the sharing of ideas, but," Bluth says, "it's always easier to be your own boss. I will never forget the times when we were sitting there, Steven particularly, in an oversized stuffed chair with his feet curled up underneath him like a little boy, all very excited, telling you all the fantastic things he sees in his head. It's exciting to work with that kind of enthusiasm. Out of that, things happened in my head. But now I have a very gifted staff and, like Steven, they enjoy sitting in a room and just letting go with the ideas. I feel quite confident we are in good shape."

Though the animator would enjoy working with Spielberg again, scheduling conflicts make a joint effort a remote possibility. "We certainly have been looking for another thing to do together. There is an *American Tail* sequel being made in London," Bluth reveals. "We are *not* making it and I don't know much about it."

Nor does he want to.

"Once I have made a picture, I sure hate to go back and make it again. I don't like sequels very much. I loved my little mouse," Bluth explains. "He [Fievel] was terrific, but to go back and do it again would have a certain sameness I would not enjoy."

Bluth's next film, *Rock-a-Doodle*, will feature a rooster as its creature lead. "Basically, *Rock-a-Doodle* has a fairly good moral to it," Bluth says. It is a fun ,picture, strictly entertainment. You will sit there and enjoy lots of belly laughs. It's a musical. The moral is simple. It's about a little boy, the littlest in his family. Everyone says he is too small to do anything. It's for the little kids in the world who think, 'I can't wait to grow up,' who are just dying to be adults. I remember those years where I wanted to grow up so badly, where I said, 'How long do I stay little?'

"So, we made a movie in which a little kid stays little, but he has to

All Dexs Art: Copyright 1989 Goldcrest & Sullivan-Bluth Ltd.

**Don Bluth readily admits that his film has gone to the dogs. They have an automatic audience appeal.**

accomplish big tasks. He's afraid to try. He has to bring the rooster back to the farm and get him to crow. The rains came and the floods came and the Sun went away because the rooster was no longer there to crow. He had gone away to the city broken-hearted. Someone has to get him. Guess who?

"The picture after that," reveals Bluth, "is less risky because it is a story about the three grey whales that were trapped in the ice in Alaska. It will be from the whales' point-of-view. We *are* going to do something new on that one. I like adding a new ingredient when we do a film. We're going to try doing the whole whale picture in 70mm, so we get a big, wide screen, and then we'll add THX sound."

Bluth still admits the thrill of watching millions of drawings combine to make a film never fades. In fact, he would be scared if the thrill ever vanished. "I just *have* to be excited. Really, if I ever feel myself seeming blase about a film, I know it's in trouble and I quickly defer to someone else who doesn't have that feeling," claims the animator. "I have enough good people around me to help out when I see grey. Generally, if I can't get excited, I don't think we will do the film. Right now, I am carefully picking stories that I can just hardly wait to do. I have about three such stories right here in front of me, so I'm confident."

The pressure to churn out more animation at an ever-increased pace may lead to a reliance on computer-generated images. Purists decry its use, while others, like Bluth, realistically acknowledge computer animation's pros and cons. "To me, it's another paint brush in the jar. If you know how to use it, it can be a very good tool and it will help you," he suggests. "If you don't know how to use it, then it intrudes on the painting. I believe very much in hand-painted cel animation. I think it is beautiful. There *are* some things the computer can help you do. It can help solve perspective problems. We have a computer department here. We have an R & D section. More and more, we are using the computers to help us, but wherever it looks as if we need the touch of the human hand and a pencil, we keep the computer out of it.

"I know some people believe the future of animation is computers, that painting will stop, no more cels. If that is the future, I'm *not* going there," Don Bluth promises. "The human touch *has* to prevail. It will because it communicates with people. I am a believer in a thought many people think is strange, that there is a spirit in what people do. An artist's spirit is in the art on his canvas. My spirit is in my animation. People put something of themselves into an artistic product, an industrial product, *any* product. Part of the richness of life, and of animation, is the appreciation of art, of what goes into it. There is no richness in a computer and, thankfully, I don't think there ever will be."

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## American

(continued from page 12)

overpresent in our society. The gangsters weren't as glamorous, but they always had a powerful connotation. I also did a commentary on the Arabs, one called "The Sneak of Araby." It was just funny."

"We had some great science fiction things in there," Simon puts in, "like Homecoming Year 3000." "

As offbeat as anything the series ever showcased, "Homecoming Year 3000" appeared in the fourth issue. It's built around a dream Johnny Flagg has of being a future-era star pilot who teams up with aliens to vanquish a common menace. The story seemed to be a vehicle for the kind of message of brotherhood and putting aside political differences which Kirby would later do with Stan Lee in their fantasy titles at Marvel.

Not a dream, but more of a nightmare was "Space-Face" in the final issue. He was an alien who Fighting American suspects of stealing critical government documents. Since Space-Face could assume any form he wished, tracking him down wasn't easy. But Space-Face's unfamiliarity with Earth customs often gave him away. While masquerading as a movie cowboy, he kisses the girl instead of the horse.

"Space-Face was our attraction with the flying saucer," Kirby recalls with a laugh. "The flying saucer was the big thing at that time. *Everybody* was seeing UFOs. And of course, we haven't seen one since!"

If Marvel's *Fighting American* hardcover is well received, could the character return? Simon and Kirby have differing reactions to the proposal.

"He would be a lot of fun to do," Jack Kirby admits, "but I wouldn't. It has been a *long* time. 50 years [that the artist has been in the business]. I've done every kind of comic from satire to serious. You name the kind of subject and I've had a hand in it. I'm retired right now."

"If this *Fighting American* has a very good sale, somebody'll probably want to publish it regularly," Joe Simon, who left comics for the advertising world, notes. "I'm willing if, say, Marvel offers to do it. I would want some supervisory role. I think I couldn't afford to write it myself. The work I'm doing now pays so much better than comics. But I would like to see it out again."

Will Fighting American return? Maybe a better question is: Can anyone keep the most irrepressible battler in comics history in permanent retirement?

## Donner

(continued from page 55)

was no sense of size to it. It lost its sense of importance."

As fans are aware, *Superman II* focuses dually on the romantic relationship between Superman and Lois Lane, who discovers the truth about Clark Kent, as well as the three Kryptonian villains rampaging on Earth. Donner recalls several significant differences between what was actually shot by him, and what ended up in the film under the direction of Richard Lester.

"My *Superman II* opens at the *Daily Planet* on the front page of a newspaper, 'Superman Saves So and So...' Lois is looking at the newspaper and her byline, and there is a photo of Superman in the newspaper, arms folded across his chest, in his typical pose. On the other side of the office, talking to Jimmy Olsen, is Clark Kent, sitting there with his arms folded in exactly the same pose. She looks at the newspaper, then at Clark and says, 'Oh my God!' She takes a pen and starts drawing, but we don't know what she's drawing. We cut back and we see that she's drawn a hat on Superman, a jacket and tie and glasses, and it's Clark Kent. Just then, Perry White calls Clark into Lois' office and says, 'I'm sending the two of you on a honeymoon scam at Niagara Falls. You're going to pose as a married couple,' and he leaves. She goes over to Clark, gives him a nudge and says, 'That'll be terrific, Clark. We can *fly* up there,' and gives him the eye. He doesn't know what she's talking about.

"Then, she says, 'You're really Superman, aren't you?' And he tells her that that's ridiculous. So, she gives him the newspaper, which he looks at and recognizes as himself. Then, she says, 'Before you say anything, I'll bet my life that you're Superman.' He lowers the newspaper and sees that she has moved to an open window and onto the ledge, 30 floors up. Then, she jumps out the window, and in a millennia of a second—everyone freezes—he shoots through the office, because he can't change, downstairs as a blur, with every loose piece of paper being caught behind him. He appears as a blur on the street. There's an awning, and he uses his vision to pop it out. Then, he blows upward as she's coming down, causing her to float like a leaf. She hits the awning, rolls off of it and onto a fruit stand, which we established in front of the building. Then, he's back upstairs in this second, looks down and calls out after her, 'Lois, are you all right? What did you do?' She looks up at him and faints deadaway. This was shot, but they chose to do that stupid opening scene with the terrorists in the Eiffel Tower.

"Another change took place at Niagara Falls. Superman saves the kid and that night in the hotel room, Clark's talking to Lois, who says, 'It's amazing that Superman showed up the way he did to save that kid.' 'Yes it is, isn't it?' 'I think it's too much of a coincidence, don't you?' 'I don't know. What do you mean?' 'I think you're really Superman.' 'Oh, Lois, isn't that silly,' you know, typical Clark. 'We went through this before and you almost killed yourself. Thank God you hit that awning. You jeopardized your own life.' Lois says, 'This time, Clark, I'm going to jeopardize yours.' She reaches into a drawer and pulls out a gun. She says, 'Clark, I believe that you're Superman so much that I'm going to take that chance.' 'Lois, put that gun down... Lois, it could be loaded!' She pulls the trigger, we hear the gun go off and he stands there. Clark stands up to his full height, takes his glasses off, his chest is practically ripping through the jacket and his voice goes from Clark Kent's to Superman's. 'Lois Lane, don't you realize what a stupid thing you just did? If I had not been Superman, you would have just killed Clark Kent.' And she says, 'What? With a blank?' He falls down in his seat and moans, looking like he's about to throw up. And that's how she found out he was Superman. It's really sickening, because all of that was shot, and they cut it out."

Some consolation did come from the fact that ABC reinserted material edited out of the original *Superman*, when the film was first aired on TV.

"The thing that got to me on the film," he says, "and I wanted to do more of it, and I guess if I didn't have so much story I would have, is the idea of Superman appealing to our daydreams. How many of us have had a great desire to *be* Superman? To be impervious to pain and accomplish anything that you set out to do? Also, it seems like people are beginning to help each other a little more, and that's the whole point of Superman. He's there to help us, and wouldn't we all like to be him for one minute? It's a mythology that reaches what is real today. Most mythology, as you know, is period in its being. Superman just seems to have gone along with time so very well.

"As for my personal feelings?" Richard Donner closes rhetorically. "I obviously have a tremendous affection for Superman and what he stands for in my life. I owe him everything."

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# Comic Screen

These characters are being developed for other media. All projects are live-action unless specified. Those marked by an asterisk have changed status since last listing. **Attn: comics & media pros:** Clarifications and other info to be added to this list are cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 6th Flr., NY, NY 10016.

**The Addams Family.** Film. Orion Pictures.

**The Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters.** Animated series. Rankin-Bass, producers.

* **The Airtight Garage.** Animated feature of Moebius series. Co-produced by Moscow's Soyuzmultfilm Studios, the North American Trading Co. & Starwatcher Graphics. Script: Randy Loficier. Production begins in January.

**The American.** Film. Joel Silver, producer. Script: Mark Verheiden.

**American Flagg!** Film.

* **Annie.** Separate film & stage musical sequels. Film to shoot April 1990. Lewis Gilbert, director. Musical *Annie II: Miss Hannigan's Revenge* reteams creators Charles Strouse, Tom Meehan & Martin Charnin. Hannigan: Dorothy Loudon. Warbucks: Harve Presnell. Opens X-Mas in Washington, D.C., March on Broadway.

**Ant-Man.** Film.

**Archie.** Film. *Archie & Veronica.* Targeted for summer 1991. Warner Bros. Script: Jeff Boam. Joel Schumacher, director. Archie: Corey Haim. Also NBC TV movie. Exec producers: Tom Patchett, Andy Heyward.

**Arzach.** Film of Moebius hero. Kirk Thatcher, producer.

**The Avengers.** Film. Not comics; John Steed. Mel Gibson may star. Script: Sam Hamm.

**Bebar.** 52 new half-hour animated episodes now airing on HBO. Nelvana, producers.

* **Batman.** Sequels planned. May film back-to-back. Cast, director TBA. Sam Hamm is scripting. Villain: the Penguin.

**Beetle Bailey.** Film. Also animated TV special. Script: Hank Saroyan.

**Beetlejuice.** Animated Saturday a.m. series airs on ABC.

**Blackhawk.** Film.

**Blade.** Film based on *Tomb of Dracula* character. Script: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin.

**Blondie.** CBS animated special.

**James Bond.** Animated series, *Adventures of James Bond Jr.*

**Betty Boop.** Animated half-hour special, *Betty Boop's Hollywood Mystery*, to air on CBS in 1990. Film. Pierre Spengler, producer. Richard Fleischer, director.

**Brenda Starr, Reporter.** Film starring Brooke Shields & Timothy Dalton. Release delayed due to New World sale.

**Bugs Bunny.** New syndicated animated series teaming Steven Spielberg & Warner Bros. features young Warner characters, *Tiny Toon Adventures*. Debuts fall 1990.

* **Bullwinkle.** *Boris & Natasha*, a live-action comedy, with Sally Kellerman & Dave Thomas. Script: Charles Fradin. Charles Martin-Smith, director. Due out February. Video release of *Bullwinkle* begins late '89.

* **Captain America.** Film. Script: Stephen Tolkin. Albert Pyun, director. Captain America: Matt Salinger. Due out in 1990.

**Cathy.** Animated TV specials on CBS. TV ads now running.

**The Chameleon.** New hero created by Stan Lee for TV. May appear in a Hulk TV movie.

**Charlie Chan.** Film.

* **Chicken Man.** Animated series based on Dick Orkin's '70s radio spoof series. Calico.

**Chip & Dale.** Animated series, *Rescue Rangers*, airs on Disney Channel & in syndication. Animated film due 1991.

**Cracked.** Superhero parody movie in development.

**Deathlok.** Film.

* **Delta Tenn.** TV series pilot just shot. Shannon Tweed stars. Touchstone TV for NBC.

* **Dick Tracy.** Film. Touchstone. Warren Beatty, director & star. Summer '90 release.

**DNAgents.** Film. UA.

**Doc Savage.** Film.

**Dr. Strange.** Film. Script: Bob Gale. Looking for studio. Separate TV movie discussed.

**Droopy.** Will co-star with son Dribble in new *Tom & Jerry Kids*, animated series from Hanna-Barbera for TBS.

* **Evangeline.** Film. Funnybook Films.

**Fantastic Four.** Film. Neue Constantin. Bernard Eichinger, producer.

**The Far Side.** Film. Alan Rudolph, director. Shopping for studio.

**Felix the Cat.** Animated film. Delayed by New World's sale.

**The Fish Police.** Animated series.

* **The Flash.** Film. Guber-Peters. CBS is discussing a TV series to use the Adam West Flash.

* **The Flintstones.** Film. Script: Steven de Souza. Joel Silver, producer. New casting rumor for Fred: John Goodman.

**Garfield.** Saturday a.m. series, *Garfield & Friends*, on CBS.

**The Green Hornet.** Film. Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish.

**Green Lantern.** Film. Joel Silver, producer. Being written.

**Gumby.** Film.

**He-Man.** New *Adventures of He-Man*, a 65-episode series, due fall 1990. LBS Communications.

**Honkytonk Sue.** Film. Optioned by Goldie Hawn.

* **The Incredible Hulk.** New NBC TV movie this season, *The*

# COMICS REPORTER

## Amazon on the Air

DC is developing a new *Wonder Woman* TV series for syndication through Warner Bros., but in the years since Lynda Carter last hurled the Princess of Paradise Island's golden lasso, the comics character has changed dramatically. Consequently, since he had revised the Amazon's mythology in the wake of the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, George Perez was called in to ready the current Wonder Woman for possible video adventure, a duty he has accepted only reluctantly.

"The last I heard, several weeks ago, they wanted *my* input on the proposal for the new TV series. Jenette [Kahn, DC Editor-in-Chief] asked me about designing villains specifically for the show," Perez says.

"I expressed my reservations about the whole idea. I'm concerned that the type of stories they're suggesting could be done with *any* kind of character. Why have a superhero? I tried to convince them that Wonder Woman's uniqueness comes from her Amazon heritage—you *don't* put her in common crime stories, at least not all the time. I'm trying to sell them on using the Cheetah as an occasional villain. They don't want to use the gods, and they don't want to use Paradise Island, either. They seem to be afraid of fantasy. Then, why pick Wonder Woman? In the earliest stages, they were talking about Julia Kapatelis being a man; Jenette nipped that one in the bud. Now, they're talking about using Julia and Vanessa, and beefing up the role of the police inspector, Ed Indelicato."

*Wonder Woman* **may return to TV in a new series.**

Wonder Woman Art: Chris Marrinan/Steve Montano/Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics

It's obvious that George Perez has a great love for these characters—and how they're handled. "What concerns me is—what will make this show different?" he asks. "And why are they afraid to take chances? If I pointed out series that take chances, like *Beauty & the Beast*, they would say, 'Yeah, but look at the ratings.' And I couldn't argue the point. They're not being as daring as I would like them to be, and I would have been naive to think they would. I was very ambivalent when Jenette and [*Wonder Woman* editor] Karen Berger talked to me about the series. My involvement is based on one thing, as cynical as it sounds: It may be *worse* if I'm not involved.

"If they do use me as a creative consultant, they're paying me—they have the option of listening or not. On the other hand, I don't know if *any* amount of money would be worth the ulcers I'll probably get."

*—Patrick Daniel O'Neill*

Death of the Incredible Hulk. Bill Bixby, director.

**Iron Man**. May debut in Hulk TV movie or solo *Iron Man* film.

**The Jetsons**. Animated film. HB/Universal. Out June 1990.

**Jonny Quest**. Syndicated animated series. Live-action film. Fred Dekker, writer/director. Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish.

**Judge Dredd**. Film. Script: Tim Hunter & James Crumley. Charles Lippincott, producer.

* **Justice League**. TV mini-series (4 hours). NBC.

**Kaptain Keen & Ko**. Planned animated series. Rankin-Bass.

**Li'l Abner**. Live-action TV series. Max & Michaeline Keller, producers. Dave Bell & Herbert Krosney, producers, plan TV specials, animated show & musical.

**Little Nemo in Slumberland**. Animated film. TMS Ent.

**The Lone Ranger**. Syndicated TV series planned. Also separate live-action film. John Landis, director. Universal.

**Lone Wolf & Cub**. Film. Edward Pressman, producer. Script: Bill Wisher.

**MacDoodle Street**. Film. Columbia. Based on Mark Alan Stamaty's *Village Voice* strip.

**MAD Magazine**. CBS special. Hanna-Barbera.

**Mai the Psychic Girl**. Film. Optioned by writer/producer Larry Wilson. Co-producer: Walter Hill. With Carolco.

**Mandrake**. Film. Julien Temple, director, trying to re-activate. May star David Bowie.

**Mickey Mouse**. Animated featurette "The Prince & the Pauper" in works.

**Mr. Jigsaw**. Ron Fortier-Gary Kato character optioned for animation by Rankin-Bass.

**Mr. Magoo**. Film. Steven Tisch, producer. Also animated film with niece, Megan Magoo.

**Mr. X**. Film. Jim Cash & Jack Epps, producers.

**My Secret Identity**. Syndicated sitcom with Ultraman airing.

**Nancy**. *Nancy The Movie*. She & Sluggo will be in their 30s. Peter Muller, producer.

**Negative Man**. New superhero created by Bob Kane. Live-action series. Nelvana.

**Neil the Horse**. Animation/live-action project.

**Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD**. Film. Stephen Herek, director. Script: Greg Pruss.

**Joe Palooka**. Musical.

**The Phantom**. Film. Bruce Sherlock, Peter Sjoquist, John Torv, Rodney Price, producers. Script: Ken Shadie. *Phantom* creator Lee Falk is consulting. Joel Schumacher *may* direct.

**Plastic Man**. Film. Separate scripts by Charles Gale & Joe Lafia. Gaber-Peters. Possible star: Pee-wee Herman.

* **The Prowler**. Film. Funnybook Films.

**The Punisher**. Film. Dolph Lundgren stars. Mark Goldblatt, director. Release delayed by New World's sale.

**Radio Boy**. Animated. Rankin-Bass.

**Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman**. Film. *May* star Jim Belushi. Script: creator David Boswell. Matt Weisman, Joseph Loeb II, producers.

**Richie Rich**. Film. Fred Savage *may* star. Joel Silver, John Davis, producers. Warner Bros.

**RoboCop**. Sequel. Script: Frank Miller. Irv Kershner, director. Now filming. Peter Weller & Nancy Allen return. Animated *Marvel Universe* may spin off solo Robo series.

**The Rocketeer**. Film. Disney. Bill Dear, director. Script: Danny Bilson & Paul De Meo.

**Roger Rabbit**. Short, "Roller-coaster Rabbit," next up. Other shorts planned: "Hare in My Soup", "Beach Blanket Bunny", "Cleaned & Impressed."

**Sally Forth**. Universal sitcom.

**Secret Agent X-9**. Animated film.

**The Shadow**. Film. Script: Howard Franklin. Martin Bregman, producer.

* **The She-Hulk**. May co-star in Hulk TV movie.

**The Simpsons**. Animated series debuts on FBC. Spin-off from *Tracy Ullman Show* features Matt Groening's characters.

**Spider-Man**. Film. Seeking *new* script. Stephen Herek, director. Animated *Marvel Universe* segment continues.

**Sub-Mariner**. Film.

**Superboy**. Syndicated TV series stars new Superboy: Gerard Christopher.

**Superman**. *Superman V* still possible.

**Swamp Thing**. Animated series.

* **Tales from the Crypt**. HBO Cable series. 19 second season episodes ordered.

* **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**. Animated series in syndication. Live-action film due March '90. Steve Barron, director. Script: Bobby Herbeck & Todd W. Langen.

**Terry & the Pirates**. Film.

Spider-Man Photo: Copyright 1989 21st Century Productions

Execs at 21st Century Productions vow that *Spider-Man* will swing into theaters around Christmas 1990.

**Sgt. Preston of the Yukon**. TV revival projected.

**Sgt. Rock**. Film. Rock: Bruce Willis. John McTiernan, director. Joel Silver, producer. Script: Steven de Souza & David Peoples.

Script: Jules Feiffer. Gene Kirkwood, John Hyde, producers. Stan Weston, exec producer. Sylvester Stallone *may* star. Ridley Scott *may* direct.

**Thor**. Animated series.

**Time Beavers**. Animated TV

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series. Kushner-Locke.

**Tin-Tin**. Film. Amblin.

**Tom & Jerry**. Film. New animated 13-episode TV series, *Tom & Jerry Kids* for TBS. Due fall 1990.

* **Trouble with Girls**. Film. 20th Century Fox & Funnybook Films. Script: Will Jacobs & Gerard Jones. Matt Pepler, Neal Tabachnick, producers.

* **Unlimited Powers**. CBS TV series pilot with super-team of DC heroes: Dr. Occult, Blok, Green Arrow's daughter & a new Flash. "Dead."

**Vampirella**. Film. Frank Moreno/Centaur Films, producer.

**V for Vendetta**. Film. Warner.

**WARP**. Film. Script: Mark Victor & Michael Grais, producers.

* **Watchmen**. Film. Script: Sam Hamm. Terry Gilliam apparently "out" as director. Joel Silver, producer. Anton Furst, production designer. Back at 20th Century Fox.

* **Whisper**. Film. "Dead."

**Wizard of Id**. Film. Script: Steven de Souza, Dana Olsen. David & Jerry Zucker to direct.

**Wolverine**. Film. Would end with character joining X-Men.

* **Wonder Woman**. TV series. (see item.)

**The X-Men**. Animated TV special/series pilot to air '89-90. This *may* be dead.

**Zen, Intergalactic Ninja**. Film. Animated series. Surge Licensing. Scripts: Steven Stern. Mark Freedman, producer.

**Zippyvision**. Film. Script: Bill Griffith & Diane Noomin. Features Zippy the Pinhead.

**Zorro**. Half-hour TV series. Zorro: Duncan Regehr. From New World & France's Ellipse Programme & Canal Plus.

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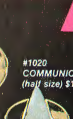

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